

**Writing *Sous Rature*: The Metaphysics of Nothingness in Samuel
Beckett's Later Prose Texts**

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ABSTRACT

Writing Sous Rature: The Metaphysics of Nothingness

in Samuel Beckett's Later Prose Texts

The object of this thesis is to argue that a selection of Samuel Beckett's later prose texts represent an examination of the plight of being, through writing, in Jacques Derrida's terms, *sous rature*. By writing *sous rature* – representing, and then putting specific images of representation “under erasure” – Beckett establishes his *own* “technique” by which to give form to the “timeless” self and world, not as an “absolute” negation or *no thing*, but as a positive nothingness (the presence of an absence, as Derrida has it). While writing *sous rature* does echo Jacques Derrida's use of the phrase, and Heidegger's earlier inquiry into the metaphysics of being in *Being and Time*, the theoretical aspect of this study, while certainly present, is slight. Instead, *sous rature* is employed as the definition of Beckett's own process of writing in these later texts which allows him to develop a new “syntax of weakness” and “literature of the unword.” By using language to represent the experience of being, and then putting that language *sous rature*, Beckett draws attention to the inadequacies of language as a means of representing the “timeless” self, and for explaining the experience of being in the world. By extension, this inability “to express” the “essential” “timeless” self through language becomes the means by which to express the experience of nothingness as the metaphysical plight of being. Although manufactured through a number of techniques, nothingness, in each instance, is all that which language fails to signify – the *residua* produced by the failure of language that encapsulates within its virtual form the unknown aspects of the “timeless” that remains outside the traditional “zone” of representation.

The texts dealt with in this thesis, which are organized according to the order in which they were written, are: *Texts for Nothing*, *How It Is*, *All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *The Lost Ones*, *Ping* and *Lessness*. The introductory first chapter of this study seeks to define the origin of Beckett's writing *sous rature* as the *Three Dialogues*, to develop the implications of Beckett's writing *sous rature*, and to provide a brief overview of a number of the past critical approaches that have been undertaken with these texts. The second chapter, concerning *Texts for Nothing*, is designed as a reconsideration of this set of thirteen *Texts*, not as an expression of Beckett's creative disintegration, but instead as a positive move towards establishing the need to reveal and then exceed the limits of language through the inaugural experimentation of representing the *blanc* spaces of nothing. Chapter three, concerning *How It Is*, reveals how identifying Beckett's writing *sous rature* produces the radical reevaluation of this text as thoroughly dialogic, while also drawing an important parallel between Beckett and the metalinguistics of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Chapter four focuses on *All Strange Away* and the metaphysical plight of being as a further development to Beckett's writing the image of being *sous rature*. In this text, Beckett seeks to express the image of the "timeless" as a *blanc* space waiting to be inscribed with a new language. Chapter five seeks to reveal the means by which Beckett employs writing *sous rature* in order to represent the underlying "timeless" nothingness of the macrocosmic rotunda in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. By giving form to the underlying nothingness, Beckett not only produces a space that admits (but in no way itemizes) the infinite complexities of the world, but is also the optimum forum in which

to accommodate the underlying chaos that evades the limits of perception. Chapter six on *The Lost Ones* examines the representation of the vanquished as mystics who perceive the mystical experience of “Nothing” in the cylinder world. It is their ability to perceive “Nothing” that puts them *sous rature* (represented and then crossed out), and which further contributes to the image of being as the presence of an absence – a positive image of the “timeless” nothing.

Ping, the subject of chapter seven, returns to the importance of the *Three Dialogues* and considers the impossibility of representing being and the world in “absolute” terms through representational art. This chapter draws upon the “original” title “Blanc” as a further indication of the means by which Beckett gives shape to the “timeless” as a *blanc* nothing by writing *sous rature*. Chapter eight, the final chapter on the “residua” texts, argues that Beckett employs his own role as author in *Lessness* as a metaphor for God, and through his strange construction of the text, represents God as the presence of an absence and the image of nothing. In doing so, Beckett is able to represent being as a “refugee,” abandoned by God, and as such, the “timeless” as the new metaphysical centre of inquiry.

CHAPTER ONE

Writing Sous Rature and the Metaphysics of Nothingness

I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [and of being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.¹

Back unsay better worse by no stretch more. If more dim less light then better worse more dim. Unsaid then better worse by no stretch more. Better worse may no less than less be more. Better worse what? They say? The said. Same thing. Same nothing. Same all but nothing.²

His book takes form in his mind. He is aware of the many concessions required of the literary artist by the shortcomings of the literary convention.³

In the first of the *Three Dialogues* (1949) with Georges Duthuit, Beckett gives voice to a new aesthetic – one that more than any other would shape his approach to fiction throughout the 1960s. There Beckett says that the modern artist has,

... nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.⁴

In the past, critics have interpreted this statement in various ways. Richard Coe, for example, argues that Beckett is saying that art “is the elucidation of the impossible,” a doomed attempt to present man as an existential “nothing” in relation to all things that themselves are “Nothing.”⁵ Michael Robinson offers a variation on this theme of the futility of expression, stating that Beckett is concerned with the impossibility of giving expression to the (again existential) “Void of the Self.”⁶ More recently, James Acheson has argued that, for Beckett, the artist has “nothing to express” in that his “natural

experience” of sense-data is always an over-simplification, and his art, deriving from perception, has nothing to tell us about the world’s infinite complexity.⁷

What binds these approaches together is that they each stress the importance of the relation between perceiver and perceived.⁸ In his monograph, *Proust* (1931), Beckett describes “the essential, the extratemporal” self⁹ – a concept that he borrows from Schopenhauer’s discussion of the “timeless subject” in *The World as Will and Idea*.¹⁰ The self is no more than an abstract concept; it is nothing in the sense that it is not available to perception, and, this makes the object (and objective) of expression the “nothing to express.” In the selection of later prose fiction in this study, Beckett seeks to go beyond the non-relation of expression in order to express the “hieroglyphics” of nothingness – the inadequacies of language in relation to the “timeless” self and the “timeless” world. The obligation to express, in other words, is succeeded in his selected prose texts by the obligation to *erase*.

The object of this study is to demonstrate that in *Texts for Nothing*, followed by *How It Is* and the later “residua” fiction of *All Strange Away* through to *Lessness*, Beckett develops a new “literature of the unword” – a literature, as Jacques Derrida would say, written *sous rature* – as the most direct means to represent the inadequacies of language in relation to the “timeless” self and world.¹¹ Through writing *sous rature* in the later prose texts, this failure of language to represent the “timeless” self and world becomes the expression of writing and then crossing that writing out – to construct the image of being and world as the presence of an absence, and therefore an image of a positive *blanc* nothing (or,

interchangeably, nothingness). In writing *sous rature*, Beckett devises a new “literature of the unword,” that binds “the inability to express” with the very object of the expressive act of artistic representation. However, while writing *sous rature* implies a direct correlation between Beckett and Derrida, the intention throughout this study is to represent this relation itself as written *sous rature*; to begin, in other words, by briefly describing Derrida’s concept of writing *sous rature*, and then to cross out that concept in the interests of demonstrating that Beckett’s approach to the failure of language is different.

In terms of writing *sous rature*, Beckett and Derrida do share some common ground – at least initially.¹² For Derrida, writing *sous rature* is most directly concerned with the fact that, “the sign is that ill-named thing...which escapes the instituting question of philosophy” – the reader must, in other words, “learn to use and erase language at the same time.”¹³ Derrida crosses out the sign and the thing in order that each represents “the mark [or the trace] of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present” that is the very experience of “thought and experience.”¹⁴ Similarly, Beckett’s writing *sous rature* – writing and then putting that writing “under erasure” – is his means to “express” the inability to represent the “timeless” self, and the experience of the “timeless” world through the written sign. Therefore, for both Beckett and Derrida, to proceed through language is to proceed by writing *sous rature*, forcing language, as soon as it attains form, to engage in a critique of itself: “At each step” Derrida writes, “I was obliged to proceed by ellipses, corrections and corrections of corrections, letting go of each concept at the very moment that I needed to use it.”¹⁵ Similarly, in each of the texts under

consideration in this study, Beckett seeks to exploit the power of language as a tool for investigating the “timeless” – whether in the form of the “timeless” self within or the “timeless” world without – through its failure to successfully account for being through writing with the express intent of failure through writing language *sous rature*.

What makes this method of writing *sous rature* Beckett’s own, is that his prose texts also represent an increasing concern with the limits of language as a means of representing nothing or nothingness as a metaphor for the “impenetrable,” and by extension, imperceptible “timeless” self and world. For Beckett, “the remainder which remains” after language has been put *sous rature* is the image of a presence of an absence, a *blanc* space, that once identified, produces a radically new reading of his later fiction. Instead of describing the importance of the experience of nothingness, as in *Murphy*, Beckett’s technique of writing *sous rature* in the later prose texts actualizes and expresses nothingness through crossing out the image and representing a *blanc* space as a metaphor for the inability of language as a vehicle of “communication” to adequately represent the “essential” self and world.¹⁶ And yet, while Beckett’s style of writing *sous rature* reveals language as an inadequate tool to represent being in any “absolute” way, it also enables Beckett to consider the issues of signification that continuously problematize any attempt to give expression to being. In the later prose texts, Beckett seeks to represent what normally exists outside the “zone” of artistic representation:

I’m working with impotence, ignorance. I don’t think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of esthetic axiom that expression is an achievement. My little exploration is that zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unquestionable – as something by definition incompatible with art.¹⁷

In the later prose, Beckett subverts the idea that “expression is an achievement,” in order to represent “that zone” of being that is considered “incompatible with art” – the “dead zone” (as Porter Abbott notes) which empties the canvas of form, admits “the presence of unavailable terms,” and thereby produces spaces of positive *blanc* nothingness.¹⁸ In 1945 Beckett stated: “...each time one wishes to make words do a true work of transference, each time one wishes to make them express something other than words, they align themselves in such a way as to cancel each other out.”¹⁹ Beckett’s later prose gives expression to being, language and nothingness or the “issueless predicament of being” a phrase which Lawrence Harvey interprets as “man’s need, which can never be abolished. He is a creature of voids that ache to be filled, of nothingness that yearns to be something.”²⁰ This study seeks to identify the ways in which Beckett actually gives nothingness presence (makes it something) in selected later prose texts – the new art of Beckett’s fiction that is given its “shape” through his style of writing *sous rature*.

Like Proust, for whom “style is more a question of vision than technique,” the “vision” of the “hieroglyphics” of nothingness in the later prose texts is achieved through Beckett’s new approach to language, which is identified as his own “technique” of writing *sous rature*.²¹ However, the nothingness that Beckett represents is not a negative quality; on the one hand, it acknowledges the impossibility of representing the “timeless” self and world through language: each time the “timeless” is represented in Beckett’s work, Beckett crosses the language out in order to identify its inadequacies. Putting language *sous rature* in this, his own way, on the other hand, is a means of illustrating how “nothing” may in words be enclosed and “that art has nothing to do with clarity.”²² Thus,

in texts such as *Texts for Nothing*, *All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ping* and *Lessness*, the images of nothingness are most specifically employed not simply as empty voids bereft of meaning, but as active *blanc* spaces that Beckett inserts into and between the language as forms for the reader to contemplate. As Beckett increasingly experiments with this form of writing in each subsequent text, the consequences that these *blanc* spaces of nothingness have on the ability to comprehend what it means to be in the world, are inextricably bound to the complex problem that is posed each time the artist tries to represent the “timeless” self in language. It is here that Beckett and Derrida converge once again to share a unified vision:

It [the *blanc*] is a dramatization which illustrates nothing, which *illustrates the nothing*, lights up a space, re-marks a spacing as a nothing, a blank: white as a yet unwritten page, blank as a difference between two lines.²³

As Derrida explains, the *blanc* spaces cannot be ignored simply because they exist between the written sign; rather, they are the white spaces that problematize the representation of being; they signify through the absence of signification. Thus, the multiple illustrations of the *blanc* spaces that Beckett creates in *Texts for Nothing*, *How It Is*, and the later “residua” texts – through the relationship of language to being and world that it fails to signify – simultaneously “illustrate[s] nothing” and “*the nothing*” of the essential or “timeless” self and world that is produced through the inadequacies of language. Each time an attempt is made to represent being or the world, in other words, Beckett puts that language and that image *sous rature*, and creates a *blanc* space that reveals the presence of the “timeless” nothing. Therefore, the various representations of the *blanc* spaces of nothingness – as this study will demonstrate – are not only intended to indicate the “inability” of language to signify what Beckett called the “the incoercible

absence of relation,” but the importance of representing and examining the *blanc* space of nothingness as “an expressive act” of the “timeless” self and world.

The identification of the representation of various forms of nothingness that Beckett develops throughout the short prose texts allows for a number of the misconceptions concerning the status of these “residua” texts to be corrected. To take perhaps the most glaring example, the history of interpretation of these texts has tended to identify them as having little of the metaphysical value that is found in Beckett’s earlier fiction. Indeed, when the relationship of these texts to the important metaphysical concerns that Beckett considers in the earlier fictions are discussed, the reader is often given the impression that the “residua” – perhaps more as a symptom of their complexities – have comparatively little to offer, and what they do have is of a negative quality. For example, in his study *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*, Lance St. John Butler adopts just such a position:

If his [Beckett’s] work is taken as a whole we can see that the heavily ironic treatment of philosophy in the early novels gives way to a desperation in the later work that seems rather beyond being helped by metaphysics or even logic.²⁴

The point of reading Beckett’s work (or indeed any work of fiction) is not to seek parallels between a specific philosophical system and the text. When the reader seeks to demonstrate a parallel between a work of fiction and a particular philosophical school of thought (say, for example, between Beckett and Derrida), the outcome unavoidably illustrates the philosophical system as opposed to the trajectory of thought that the text itself is intending the reader to follow. Instead, the objective must be to determine what

the texts themselves are illustrating in terms of their commentary on being (the root of philosophy is in life and the book). Therefore, the contention that Beckett's later short prose texts are either void of metaphysical import or represent a kind of metaphysical desperation is suspect; rather, the point is how these later texts, like all the great and lasting works of literature, help the reader to understand an aspect of the relationship between the subject and the object (or concept) under examination. This study, therefore, seeks to do what no other study of the later prose has deemed possible: to explore Beckett's writing as an expression of the limits of language and the way in which these limits engender certain outcomes intended to determine that which remains beyond the context of signification – to give expression to, as opposed to determine in any absolute way, the shape of the “timeless” self and world as the *blanc* spaces of nothingness.

While there is certainly less of an overt expression of philosophical ideas in the “residua” than in his previous fiction, it is nonetheless clear that Beckett's philosophical background is still apparent in these texts. Texts like *All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ping* and *Lessness* develop an underlying Cartesian concern that the ultimate reality of being is located in the mind, which allows Beckett to transcend the artificial appearance of the external world, and instead to express the underlying nothingness that exists in both the subject and object. In a text like *The Lost Ones*, the behavior of the vanquished in the “flattened cylinder” world is a reflection of Arnold Geulincx' statement, “Where you are worth nothing, there you should wish for nothing,” and more importantly, Arthur Schopenhauer's description of the “timeless” experience of “Nothing” that attends the mystic. While there are indeed no overt philosophical

references, a philosophy of nothingness that draws discreetly upon Beckett's past influences takes shape each time Beckett undertakes a different approach to writing *sous rature*. Interestingly, in a letter dated from 1967, Beckett stated that:

If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the "Naught is more real..." and the "Ubi nihili vales..." both already in *Murphy* and neither very rational.²⁵

By increasingly emphasizing the importance of the microcosm of the mind in the "residua," Beckett – as he did earlier in *Murphy* (1938) – expresses the Democritean idea that "Nothing is more real than nothing" (which also surfaces in *Malone Dies*) by giving shape to the "timeless" self as nothingness that is produced through the matrix of the limits of language. In these later prose texts, it would be erroneous to state that Beckett seeks to determine what "nothing" is, for nothing is the name given to the multitude of unknowns. As Beckett makes clear, it is the artist's treatment of nothing as something (the *blanc* spaces), that is communicated once language has been seen to fail.

Identifying writing *sous rature* as Beckett's new "syntax of weakness" opens up a number of possible lines of inquiry into these later short prose texts. It makes possible more traditional close readings such as those on *Texts for Nothing* (1955), *All Strange Away* (1963-4) and *The Lost Ones* (1966), along with what might be loosely described as postmodern-like approaches to *Ping* (1966) and *Lessness* (1969). What remains invariable is that by focussing on Beckett's work as a process of writing *sous rature*, the complexities of his writing can be analyzed systematically, and, of paramount importance, the system of inquiry itself is flexible enough to allow the variety of "ideas" that Beckett investigates to be accommodated. The express intention of this study, then, is

to open these texts up to new and – whenever possible – unconventional readings, concerned with the intention of generating definable outcomes that are very much in accord with what James Knowlson and John Pilling astutely define in the opening pages of their study, *Frescoes of the Skull*:

It may be that, with works of such density and uniqueness, there is a need to develop a correspondingly original kind of criticism, which will not depart so far from tradition as to become esoteric, but which will not be afraid to be unconventional when the need arises.²⁶

And yet, to discuss these texts clearly is part of the difficulty; on the one hand, to clarify what appears unclear – even following numerous readings – is to artificially reorganize the material, which helps the reading process but paradoxically undermines the very message that Beckett is intending to articulate. Attempting, on the other hand, to remain true to the intentions of a body of “prose that undermines and moves away from clarity, complicating what has at first seemed perfectly simple, raising more problems than it solves” only promises to reintroduce the reader’s experience of defamiliarization.²⁷ Essentially, what remains inescapable is that, the complex nature of these texts renders inevitable the fact that every reading will contribute its own special case of misreading to the history of Beckett’s later fiction, and that this, moreover, is the allure of these texts. Beckett consciously undermines the reader’s expectation of the conventions of prose, and thereby continuously deconstructs the ways in which stable meanings are constructed. Indeed, the experience of these texts is capably summed up in John Pilling’s description of *All Strange Away*: “Even with the benefit of hindsight we may not always feel certain of Beckett’s drift, and repeated reading of the text may leave one more puzzled.”²⁸ Accessibility and clarity, therefore, must remain the overriding critical concern, but not at

the price of artificial signification. Insight is only afforded by identifying, for the first time, what these narratives contribute to our understanding of the self and the world.

The fact that there does not exist a study concerning the increasing importance of nothingness in the later short prose is directly due to the fact that Beckett's writing *sous rature* – as a new system in which to explore the inexpressibility of being and world – has remained unidentified. Part of the reason why so few systematic approaches to these texts have been established is that the very same terms that have been applied to the language in the short prose fiction – “minima,” “residua,” “compressed,” “fragmentary” and so on – apply equally to the extent to which these texts have been critically investigated. In fact, the only way to account for the lack of critical readings is that these texts are – even in relation to the highly difficult fiction in Beckett's early and middle prose periods – the most cryptic and refractory texts in Beckett's entire *oeuvre*. And yet, some of the complexities are alleviated by recognizing that these texts form a natural “family” no different from, for example, the *Three Novels* (*Molloy*/ *Malone Dies*/ *The Unnamable*) that preceded them, or the later trilogy *Nohow On* (*Company*/ *Ill Seen Ill Said*/ *Worstward Ho*) that followed roughly a decade later.²⁹ The fact that the “residua” are easily distinguishable from any other example of Beckett's work is directly the result of Beckett's approach to language as a means to uncover the underlying nothingness of the “timeless” self and world. Therefore, this study begins and ends with these texts as a means to provide a unified and thorough examination of a unified series concerned, as no other area of Beckett's work before or after them, with the expression of nothingness.

J.E. Dearlove, in her important study, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art* (1982), draws almost exclusively upon the comments made at the end of the *Three Dialogues* (1949) in order to argue that Beckett is attempting to find a literary shape for the idea that there is no "relation" between the artist and his art, and that the strategy in Beckett's fiction therefore is to "create a non-relational art."³⁰ As Beckett makes clear in the *Three Dialogues* (and indeed as he did earlier in *Proust*) the "occasion" between the artist and the world is one of a non-relation. Both the subject, and the object that it represents, are always in flux, representation is always subjective, and there exists a "deep gulf" between the subject and the object that predetermines the failure to represent what Schopenhauer terms "the thing in itself." Following this line of argument, Dearlove views the "residua" fiction as Beckett representing the relation of non-relation, only this time between the reader and the text. For Dearlove, Beckett structures these narratives in order to manifest the impossibility of accounting for their representation as anything other than the experience of the impossibility of arriving at definitive conclusions.

However, positioning the "residua" as works representing the non-relation between the reader and the text, between the perceiver and the perceived, is a problematical one. To suggest that the reader who reads these narratives in order to arrive at defensible and definable outcomes can expect, in the end, to be defeated by these texts, is only to further marginalize and subdue the complexity of Beckett's undertaking. The non-relation in the "residua" texts is not between the reader and the text, but fleetingly between the writer and the language, and most specifically between the language and the "timeless" object

of representation. By seeking to exhaust language that in the past has represented “existence at the expense of all that it excludes,” Beckett is able to represent its failure with the express intent of representing the *blanc* nothingness of the “timeless” self as something.³¹ Beckett, therefore, transcends the impossibility of representation by representing the *residua* of the non-relation between language and being as the space of nothing through writing *sous rature*. In doing so, the failure of representation becomes Beckett’s greatest success; through writing language *sous rature*, he represents the “timeless” self and world as a non-signified *blanc* space of nothingness – the metaphysical “zone” that he indicates has always remained beyond language and outside the bounds of art. It is this “timeless” nothingness located within the self and world, and the different techniques which Beckett employs to create this *blanc* space, that the reader must go in search of in each of these narratives.

Interestingly, when it comes to reading these, Beckett’s most post-modern texts, post-modernly, it is the literary theorists who appear to experience the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with Beckett’s objectives.³² For the most part, literary theorists argue that the short prose texts are all about “indeterminacy.” For example in, *In Different Words*, Leslie Hill states that Beckett’s intention is “to force the reader to adopt new strategies of their own devising” and that Beckett is “plotting, in words, a series of impossible evanescent aporetic places having neither entry nor exit.”³³ Hill does not, in fact, explain what forms these “new strategies” might take; nor is the (indefensible) position of writing “aporia” (naturalized from *The Unnamable* and the later text *Worstward Ho*) ever actually put to the text/test. Again, in the essentially Lacanian

readings contained in *Desire and Paradox*, David Watson deals with these texts in brief, and unashamedly concludes that there can be no clear interpretations of these texts.³⁴ Literary theory, to have any value whatsoever, must award the reader with outcomes, as opposed to red herrings that seek to obscure rather than clearly articulate the intentions (and, indeed, even that which is not intended) of the author. As such, *sous rature* is not simply a theoretical term that has been appropriated from outside Beckett's examination of language. Rather, it is *Beckett's* approach to language and the experience of being in these texts, and it reveals his variety of representations of the experience of nothingness.

While postmodern theorists have provided the least amount of critical space to these texts, more traditional approaches to fiction (most specifically formalist) have considered these narratives as Beckett representing the "condition of the writer in terms of the properties of language" and the difficulties that Beckett experienced in writing these texts.³⁵ In many areas, formalist readings have contributed a great deal of important information essential for any reader interested in how these texts relate to Beckett's previous fiction writing. The most comprehensive study of the language in the later short prose is located in Susan Brienza's formalist *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, in which she ably identifies the allusions and repetitions of language located within the short prose texts that are also located "elsewhere" in Beckett's *oeuvre*. The difficulty with this, however, and with other formalist approaches, is that they tend to reorganize the language of the text into a more ordered format – introducing order through constructing language families – where order is intentionally the antithesis of the idea that Beckett is

seeking to represent. Moreover, the stories of these narratives often tend to be shaped by the critical methodology. As Brienza says:

Hermetic languages become the enclosed spaces of Beckett's later metafiction, constricted styles delimiting constrained domes, oblongs, cylinders, and boxes in which his recent characters are confined either moving or straining to be still. As the later Beckettian character becomes increasingly slow and then altogether immobile in an incrementally smaller area, he comes to represent both writer and reader, frustrated yet challenged by the borderlines of creative thought and linguistic progression.³⁶

To conclude, as Brienza does, that the figures in these texts are the images of the writer and the reader, and further, that these texts are about interpreting texts and the difficulties of writing, is not an altogether satisfactory answer to the question posed by the difficult language of these texts. When we are told that, "what remains for the reader to follow in the recent metafiction are half-human creatures metaphorically struggling through fields of language," this observation says more about the intentions of the critic and the traditional mode of analysis being used, than the actual concerns of the author.³⁷ Therefore, while a text like *Lessness* is undoubtedly formalist – here "form *is* content, content *is* form" – it is by recognizing the way in which the narrative is written *sous rature* that allows the reader to transcend the explanation of the writer's relation to the text, and in this case identify what Beckett's construction of the text says concerning the metaphysical.³⁸ Further, identifying the writing as *sous rature* and the ensuing production of nothingness enables the reader to experience these texts from the perspective that Beckett articulated earlier in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*: "The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms."³⁹ None of these studies noted above considers the way in which, through writing

sous rature, the language gives shape to nothingness and allows Beckett to situate and represent all that which escapes signification through the relationship of being and world in their non-relation to language.

The only text that was written during this period that is not considered in this study is *Enough* (1965), which was written between *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965) and *The Lost Ones* (1966). If “the thing to avoid,” as the Unnamable says, “is the spirit of the system,” then *Enough* is the text which remains stylistically outside of Beckett’s work during this period. Indeed, Beckett admitted that he did not know “what [had] come over him” and that *Enough* is “out of place in the series,” as it clearly has more in common with *From an Abandoned Work* (to take just one example).⁴⁰ Instead, the decision “to begin” with *Texts for Nothing* (1951) is a result of the fact that Beckett is clearly beginning to allow the language to be arranged in such a way as to represent and give form to the *blanc* spaces of nothingness. Indeed, while *Texts for Nothing* is often considered a less successful extension of what Beckett attempted in *The Unnamable*, it actually begins to represent the importance of the *blanc* spaces of nothing and their relation to language and “timeless” self and world. Further, the fact that these thirteen texts were translated and included with the other “residua” fiction in *No’s Knife* (1967), suggests that Beckett saw *Texts* as the forerunner of what would become his writing *sous rature* and the exploration of the *blanc* spaces of nothingness as they corresponds to the “timeless” self within and “timeless” world without.

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: the Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 352. All future references are to this edition.

² Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, in *Nohow On: Company/ Ill Seen Ill Said/ Worstward Ho/* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 110.

³ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1931), p. 1. All future references are to this edition.

⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 139. All future references are to this edition.

⁵ Richard Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 4.

⁶ Michael Robinson, *The Long Sonata of the Dead* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 38.

⁷ James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice: Criticism, Drama and Early Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), p. 97.

⁸ Another example of this is Peter Murphy in his study *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 35. Speaking of the term "Nothing" in the title of *Texts for Nothing*, Murphy states, "Nothing cannot mean in this instance the absolute negation of which 'Three Dialogues' spoke." Conversely, the position of nothingness as the object of expression which is the position in this study, is held by Stan Gontarski in his study *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 10. There, Gontarski states, "'Nothing to express' is also an active phrase: what remains to be expressed is nothingness, primary absences, even though that needs to be done with the faulty system of language, a system whose referential quality is in serious question." It is the position of this study that it is exactly "the faulty system of language" of which Gontarski speaks, that gives rise to the representation of nothingness as a metaphor for the "timeless" self and world.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 56. There Beckett writes, "Imagination, applied – a priori – to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real. Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object, because they are automatically separated by the subjects consciousness of perception, and the object loses its purity and becomes a mere intellectual pretext or motive. But thanks to this reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal."

¹⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldance and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), Volume I, p. 231.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. xiv. All future references are to this edition.

¹² As past critics have noted, Derrida has stated his affiliation with Beckett. See Porter Abbott in *Beckett Writing Beckett: the Author in the Autograph* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 23-51. More specifically, in "An Interview with Jacques Derrida" in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 60-1, Derrida, speaking of Beckett, states, "This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close[...]He is both nihilist and he is not nihilist. Above all, this question should be treated as a philosophical problem outside or above the texts...The composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even the one that seem most 'decomposed' [the *residua* fiction], that's what 'remains' finally the most 'interesting,' that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematics is exhausted." The connection between Derrida and Beckett, which Derrida does not state, is writing *sous rature*. What "remains" is the "*residua*" which is produced by writing *sous rature* – the *blanc* nothingness.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, "Translator's Preface," *Of Grammatology* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, p. xiv.

¹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in *Of Grammatology*, p. xvii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

¹⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 45.

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, quoted in Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," *New York Times* 6 May 1956, sec.2, p. 3.

¹⁸ Porter Abbott, "Political Beckett," in *Beckett Writing Beckett: the Author in the Autograph*, p. 127-148.

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, "La Peinture des van Veldes, ou le monde et le pantalon," p. 352. Quoted in John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett*, p.19.

²⁰ Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 419-20.

²¹ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 67.

²² Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 247. The allusion to art having “nothing to do with clarity” is from Denis Devlin in *transition*, no.27 1938. Quoted in John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 18.

²³ Jacques Derrida, “The First Session” in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 160.

²⁴ Lance St. John Butler, *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), p. 13.

²⁵ Samuel Beckett, letter to Sigle [sic] Kennedy, June 14, 1967, in *Disjecta*, p. 113.

²⁶ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1979), p. xi. All future references are to this edition.

²⁷ Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 378.

²⁸ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 136.

²⁹ *Worstward Ho* represents a similar process of writing *sous rature* in order to produce the *blanc* spaces of nothing located in the later trilogy of novels *Nohow On*. However, this study is concerned with the practice as it applies in its formation and an analysis of the “timeless” in the maligned “residua” fiction.

³⁰ J.E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Non-Relational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 3.

³¹ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, p. 145.

³² Porter Abbott discusses the modernist/postmodernist “turf war” in relation to Beckett’s middle period fiction in his chapter, “Beckett and Postmodernism” in *Beckett Writing Beckett: the Author in the Autograph*, p. 23-51.

³³ Leslie Hill, *Beckett’s Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 141. Hill also states that it is “misleading to assume that they make up an homogenous whole.” This study does take these texts as an “homogenous whole” and yet as noted, by employing Beckett’s various experiments to writing *sous rature*, identifies the underlying theme as being the metaphysical implications of nothingness.

³⁴ P.J. Murphy, Werner Huber, Rolf Breuer, Konrad Schoell in *Critique of Beckett Criticism: A Guide to Research in English, French, and German* (Columbia: Camden House, Inc., 1994), p. 35, state, “These studies by Hill and Watson make it clear that a full-scale study into Beckett’s post-trilogy texts is required to do them justice.”

³⁵ Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*, p. 195.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁸ Samuel Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno . Vico .. Joyce," in *Disjecta*, p. 27.

³⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), p. 123.

⁴⁰ Samuel Beckett to John Fletcher, quoted in Brian Finney, "Assumption to Lessness: Beckett's Shorter Fiction," in *Beckett the Shape Changer: A Symposium*, ed. Katherine Worth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 75.

CHAPTER TWO

The Limits of Language: The *Blanc* Spaces of *Texts For Nothing*

All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.¹

At first it can only be a matter of somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies all.²

In *Textes pour rien*, written in 1951, Beckett sought to free himself from the “attitude of disintegration” that had characterized his earlier novel, *L'Innommable*:³ “At the end of my work there is nothing but dust. ... The very last thing I wrote – *Textes pour rien* – was an attempt to get out of this attitude of disintegration but it failed.”⁴ What he meant by this attitude of disintegration has occasioned much comment, and has often led critics to interpret the title *Texts for Nothing* as a self-reflexive statement concerning the literary worth of the texts themselves.⁵ Recently, however, Porter Abbott has argued that these texts signify a new beginning for Beckett.⁶ However, identifying *Texts for Nothing* as a new beginning is only possible if we examine the ways in which these narratives elucidate and give form to the as yet unidentified metaphysical issues that Beckett is exploring.⁷ Most specifically, *Texts for Nothing* constitutes Beckett’s inaugural developments of the “new no” of the *blanc* spaces of nothingness each time language fails to represent the unknowable “timeless” self and world.

While it is clear that the ongoing fracturing of the self throughout *Texts for Nothing* leads back to the same practice in *The Unnamable*, determining the shape of the *blanc* spaces

of nothingness in *Texts* leads us to the uncharted centre of what Beckett is seeking to do in his later “residua” prose.⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, the redefining of Beckett’s comments concerning the intentions of representational art in the *Three Dialogues* (1949) draws an explicit parallel to the central objectives he is expressing in *How It Is*, the “residua” texts, and here for the first time in *Texts for Nothing*. In *Three Dialogues*, the obligation is to express what Beckett calls in *Proust* the “essential,” and what Schopenhauer calls the “timeless” self and world, as *blanc* spaces of nothingness. Writing *sous rature* is Beckett’s own method of intentionally exposing the inadequacies of language in relation to the “timeless” self and world. Further, the failure of language in relation to the “timeless” is Beckett’s means to represent being as a presence that contains within it an invisible and inexpressible self that – since it exists beyond the limits of language – can only be indicated by nothingness.

While P.J. Murphy has argued that there has been too much emphasis on nothingness, and that it (nothing) is not as important as the title may lead the reader to suspect, the phrase “for Nothing” in *Texts for Nothing* takes on new significance when understood to refer to all that exists beyond the limits of language as a means of representing the “timeless” self.⁹ Thus, while Beckett does not construct nothingness through writing *sous rature* in *Texts* as intensely as in the later “residua,” he does stress the importance of the *blanc* spaces of nothingness that are created and revealed by the limits of language. As John Fletcher has observed,

The title of the thirteen *Texts for Nothing* is based on the musical term *mésure pour rien*, meaning “a bar’s rest.” Thus a *texte pour rien* would be a grouping of words conveying nothing, and this is in fact, more or less, what we find.¹⁰

The numerous allusions to nothingness located throughout *Texts* are intended to lead the reader to the as yet unidentified representation of the *blanc* spaces of nothingness (as the presence of an absence) where Beckett actually gives form to the failure to represent being in language.¹¹ The allusion to the “bar’s rest” in the title, therefore, is intended to indicate that *Texts for Nothing* contains within it spaces of nothingness that exist beyond signification – the *blanc* spaces that succeed the artists obligation (as stated in the *Three Dialogues*) to give expression to both the “timeless” self and the “timeless” world.

Although the emphasis on spatial geometry is clearly less explicit in *Texts* than in the later “residua” fiction, the narrative structure of each of the thirteen *Texts* suggests an early indication of the way in which Beckett will treat images of spatial geometry as the presence of an absence – a “timeless” nothingness – in the later prose. For example, in the later “residua” text *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), the geometrical framework of the rotunda as a metaphor for the macrocosm within the microcosm of the mind is represented and then put *sous rature* in order to give form to the “timeless” nothingness of the world that escapes the limits of perception and by extension, language:

No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda.¹²

In the above passage, the infinite complexities of the world are represented, “Islands, waters, azure, verdure” and then, following this “one glimpse,” are put *sous rature*. Indeed, the only reason that the reader can speak about the macrocosmic rotunda is

because it has been represented, which is only then made absent by a process of putting that writing and that image *sous rature*. For something to be made absent, in other words, it must first be represented, as one cannot “omit” an omission (or stated another way, one cannot “omit” something that was not originally present). The image of the rotunda, therefore, becomes an image of a presence of an absence – something that is also a *blanc* space of nothing. As such, instead of attempting to account “absolutely” for the infinite complexities of the world through language, Beckett deposits the complexities in the spaces of nothingness which are given form as a result of representing the spatial geometry of the rotunda as something *that is* nothing. The result, is that this *blanc* nothingness used to signify the “timeless” rotunda becomes the most important aspect of its representation – as that which always exists outside of the “zone” of representation. Thus, although the infinite complexities remain perfectly “inexplicable,” the fact that they exist as a *blanc* nothingness allows them to attain presence and be represented as perfectly “intelligible.”¹³

Similarly, the spatial geometry in *Texts* is also structured to represent something like a rotunda – a circular narrative structure that contains within it *blanc* spaces or “intervals” of nothingness (that allow Beckett to give form to the limits of language) located within a rectangular “text.”¹⁴ Like the circle with its spacing in *Watt* (1953), and the fists of the lost bodies momentarily frozen “in their arcs” in *The Lost Ones* (1966), the fractured circularity of *Texts* is produced each time the language fails to provide an answer to a statement or question articulated at the outset of each narrative.¹⁵ For example, the voice in “Text 3” asks, “What matter who’s speaking?” (109), with the response, “no one has

spoken,” and “the voices wherever they come from, have no life in them” (113). As such, while the return to the beginning of each narrative is intended to suggest that no progress has been made (to end at the same place you have begun is to have achieved nothing), the failure to answer the question satisfactorily – to provide what J.E. Dearlove calls, the “illusion of an answer” – further suggests that a complete rotation has not been achieved.¹⁶ Instead, a *blanc* space between the beginning and the end subverts the search for final answers, and by extension, allows Beckett to give a positive representational form – through the presence of the absence of the *blanc* space – to nothing. Here, the “bar’s rest” is a *blanc* space – Beckett’s variation on “*mésure pour rien*” – and is full of potential meaning: it problematizes the ability to provide absolute answers to specific questions, and yet must, paradoxically, also be the space where these meanings are housed – written, in a sense, and then crossed out by the inability of language to signify anything in absolute terms. Throughout *Texts for Nothing* it is Beckett’s express intention to “invent” these *blanc* spaces of “nothing” (118), and to give form to “nothing where there was never anything” (154).

Significantly, this postulating of question and answer at times takes on a more direct metaphysical frame of reference when, for example, in “Text 6” the narrator begins by asking, “How are the intervals filled between these apparitions?” (122). The answer that is provided nearing the conclusion of this text points directly to the metaphysical issues that accompany the presence of the absence of the *blanc* spaces that problematize the ability of language to account for the “timeless” world of being:

... and how the intervals are filled, as if I didn’t know, as if there were two things, some other thing besides this thing, what is it, this unnamable thing

that I name and name and never wear out, and I call that words. It's because I haven't hit on the right ones, the killers, haven't heaved them up from that heart-burning glut of words, with what words shall I name my unnamable words? (125)

Each time the narrator attempts to represent being in language, the spacing of a “bar’s rest” forms between signifier and signified and gives shape to a *blanc* space that subverts the desired closure – “Sheets of black paper” as the narrator in *All Strange Away* (1963-4) notes, “shine like the rest.”¹⁷ However, as Beckett seeks to demonstrate here, words are “porous,” and therefore always fail to represent being accurately, as the “thing in itself” that is the “timeless” remains beyond even being named “unnamable”: to be called “unnamable,” is still to be called something in language, which in turn fractures the circularity of the idea that language is able to account for being with a proper name.¹⁸ Therefore, in order to make sense of the impossibility of representing the self of being in language, Beckett’s objective throughout *Texts* is to develop a new language that will be capable of acknowledging the *blanc* spaces of nothingness that form as the “residua” from “lifeless words” (151) each time an author or a writer seeks – and most importantly fails – to capture the essence of being in language.

The failure of language produces the metaphysical plight of being: to search for the meaning of being through language is always to give shape to that *blanc* space of nothingness which remains outside the limits of language itself. And yet, as Beckett seeks to demonstrate here in *Texts*, and indeed throughout his later prose, because this failure of language leaves, as in *Ping*, the “traces blurs signs no meaning” that are the “residua” of language, the nothingness that problematizes the representation of being – even if it does

remain outside of language – becomes something.¹⁹ Here, one is reminded of Sam's observation in *Watt*: "to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill... [f]or the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something."²⁰ Thus, in *Texts for Nothing*, language is described as "a single endless word" that has been reduced to nonsense – the limits (or "the end") of which mark the emergence of the *blanc* space of nothingness:

And I should hear, at every little pause, if it's the silence I say when I say that only words break it. But nothing of the kind, that's not how it is, it's for ever the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end gives meaning to words. (131)

Like the *blanc* space of nothingness that emerges at the end of each text, the act of combining all words together into "the same murmur" cannot account for the essential nature of being. Instead, the "timeless" self exists in the intervals, in "every little pause" (131), in the spaces between signifiers, in the silence where language itself is put *sous rature* in order to resonate that soundlessness and "speechlessness" (115) that is silence. That being attempts to fill these "pauses" or *blanc* spaces with language produces one long "murmur" of words "flowing unbroken," and implies the pretext that if enough words are spoken, then at some future stage being will attract "the right ones, the killers"(125). To reach the limits of language, therefore, must be the objective of the writer – where "the end gives meaning to words." On the one hand, "the end gives meaning to words" is the very failure of language that gives shape to what it fails to signify (in this case the "timeless" self). On the other hand, it is only after language has been exhausted and put *sous rature*, and all that is left is the *blanc* space of nothingness, that the "timeless" essence of being begins to take shape in the silence, and the writer's

inability to express himself/herself in words can be given form as nothing. As such, Beckett does give form to the *blanc* space of nothingness in *Texts* by alluding to the *blanc* space of nothingness where “maybe a nature” – the essential, “timeless” self – is housed.

Throughout *Texts for Nothing*, language is represented as an inadequate tool with which to represent being: “Name, no, nothing is namable, tell, no, nothing can be told, what then, I don’t know, I shouldn’t have begun” (144). Being is the “unnamable thing” that cannot be represented in language given that the function of language is designed to describe ordinary, everyday perceptual experience. Each time a writer attempts to represent being in language, the failure of language gives rise to the *blanc* spaces that subvert the ability of language to represent the self. To tell a story, therefore, is to be trapped in a fiction that has no meaning so far as defining the experience of being through words is concerned. In “Text 4,” the self divides into a dialogic “I” and a “he” which allow Beckett to consider the impossibility of finding the underlying centre of being through the fictions that language creates:

He thinks words fail him, he thinks because words fail him he’s on his way to my speechlessness, to being speechless with my speechlessness, he would like it to be my fault that words fail him, of course words fail him. He tells his story every five minutes, saying it is not his, there’s cleverness for you. (115)

Commenting upon this passage, Susan Brienza has stated that “either the “I” is making his figment talk, or “he” has created “I” as one of his figments, or there is only one “I” who tells lies” – and here Brienza leaves us to ponder other possibilities.²¹ What is certain is that for Beckett silence is pure communication – it is the freedom of “being speechless” with “speechlessness.” To be able to identify the “I” of the “timeless” self

demands a new language that speaks “speechlessness,” that posits the *blanc* nothingness and avoids the “black nothing” of the written sign “and its impossible shades” (154). To have silence speak is to develop a new language, a “new no,” that transcends words and the fictive stories they produce – to situate being in the *blanc* nothingness of silence: “that’s the mistake I made,” the narrator concludes, “one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough” (116). Such “silence,” as Malone notes, “has nothing negative about it.”²²

In fact, it is through the use of the “trace” in “Text 13,” that Beckett achieves the seemingly impossible feat of having the *blanc* spacing of silence, where the *timelessness* of being exists, speak. Simply put, a trace is a spatial impression that leaves the marking of a past presence on a space that is now absent (except, that is, for the trace itself). For example, when Robinson Crusoe finds Friday, he forgets about the footprint (the trace) that he found earlier in the sand. Thus, the function of the trace is to lead back to the origin of the thing that originally produced the trace, which in turn effaces the importance of the trace and substitutes a presence (Friday) in its place (the footprint, which is the presence of an absence). Therefore, the trace in “Text 13,” allows silence to exist as something (nothingness):

...there is nothing but a voice murmuring a trace. A trace, it [the voice] wants to leave a trace, yes, like air leaves among the leaves, among the grass, among the sand, it’s with that it would make a life...there will be silence, the air quite still that trembled once an instant, the tiny flurry of dust quite settled. Air, dust, there is no air here, nor anything to make dust, and to speak of instants, to speak of once, is to speak of nothing... (152-3)

This passage concludes with an example of Beckett writing *sous rature*, as the physical world of “Air” and “dust” are represented and then put *sous rature* with, “there is no air here, nor anything to make dust,” while time, “to speak of instants,” is equally crossed out to represent nothing, “to speak of once, is to speak of nothing.” However, it is the central importance of the trace that holds the greatest interest. For Beckett, the trace of the voice, and the language that it employs to project its presence, effaces the possibility of leading being back to the origin of the “timeless” self, in that “there is nothing but a voice murmuring a trace.” However, while words fail to signify, in that they leave their impression like air that has cut through grass or sand, they do leave the something of nothingness – a *blanc* space – in their wake. This *blanc* nothingness of the trace to which Beckett alludes is the “residua” that is left behind due to the failure of words, as all that which remains after language has been exhausted.

While there is a need to transcend language in order to arrive at the *blanc* space of nothingness, it is an inescapable fact that being has always sought to situate itself in language as a means to construct itself through language and to acquire meaning for its existence. However, while the self identifies itself through language, in doing so, language and being mirror one another in what is referred to in *All Strange Away* as “completed propositions, such as [*blanc*].”²³ In other words, the inability to exact accurate, “completed propositions” from language for the meaning of being causes being to become an image of the incompleteness of language itself. In “Text 8,” the narrative voice recognizes that it is immersed in words that fail to signify, and therefore wishes to

escape from the inadequacy of words that project this image of in-completion onto the meaning of being:

Me, here, if they could open, those little words, open and swallow me up, perhaps that is what has happened. If so let them open up again and let me out, in the tumult of light that sealed my eyes, and of men, to try and be one again. (132)

In his German letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett says, “As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through.”²⁴ Similarly, Beckett makes clear here in *Texts* and later in the “residua” prose that “what lurks behind [language]” is the crucial “fidelity to failure” that he describes in his dialogues with Duthuit. In order to confer meaning on being, the writer must seek an escape from language, must pry words open, “let them open up again and let me out,” to “dissolve” the “terrible materiality of the word surface.”²⁵ Only when it is evident that language is inadequate to describe the a-spatial and the a-temporal, will the writer acquire a horror of language, whether it is used to describe the tangible or intangible: “No, no souls, or bodies, or birth, or life, or death, you’ve got to go on without any of that junk, that’s all dead with words, with excess of words, they can say nothing else” (142-3). In the later prose texts, Beckett will in fact do away with all these experiences in order to express the idea of nothingness that reveals – each time language fails and it takes shape – that due to the “timeless” nature of the self, “we cannot know and we cannot be known.”

As long as being remains “in words made of words others’ words” nothing will change.²⁶ However, while there is a need to peel away the layers of language in order to arrive at the “ideal” self throughout *The Unnamable* and again here in *Texts*, there is also the fear of the consequences that such an act might produce. While the relationship of being to language is often hostile, “Vile words to make me believe I’m here” (145), “scattered by the everlasting words” (144), swallowed by “those little words” (132), or buried in “wordshit” (137) to name just a few, the problem is that being is a construct of language, and therefore the fall of language into an absolute nothingness threatens being to a similar fate: “So long as the words keep coming nothing will have changed, there are the old words out again. Utter there’s nothing else, utter, void yourself of them, here as always, nothing else. But they are failing, true, that’s the change, they are failing, that’s bad, bad. Or it’s the dread of coming to the last, of having said all, your all, before the end, no, for that will be the end, the end of all, not certain” (106). “Not certain,” because “the end of all” words could potentially see being disappear, which would reveal that the *blanc* spaces and being are essentially meaningless.

The representation of perception in language is always an artificial re-organization of sense-data that suggests an artificial order which Beckett, being more concerned with anti-logical relations, disdained. Speaking of Proust, Beckett writes, “By his impressionism I mean his non-logical statement of phenomenon, the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect.”²⁷ And yet, all representations are by the nature of the limits of perception and the limits of the written sign over-simplifications of the

complexities of the external world. Each time the writer attempts to capture the world through the word, all that which remains outside of human knowledge (the “timeless” self and the “timeless” world) is excluded and forms the *blanc* spaces of nothingness – the white spaces between words and along the margins of any given representation. It is because the writer cannot accommodate the boundless “big buzzing blooming confusion” of sense-data in his work that Beckett seeks to give form to this excess as the *blanc* spaces of nothingness in *Texts*.²⁸ As a result, while Beckett represents the *blanc* spaces of nothingness in the super-structure of the text as well as through the representation of the exhaustion of language, he also represents the limits of perception as the means in which to include within it the *blanc* spaces. Throughout *Texts*, the *blanc* spaces that problematize the ability of being to represent the essential world through perception are given form by Beckett in order to accommodate that which exists outside of the limits of representation – the essential, “timeless” world. For example, “Text 1” begins:

I'll describe the place, that's unimportant. The top, very flat, of a mountain, no a hill, but so wild, so wild, enough. Quag, heath up to the knees, faint sheep-tracks, troughs scooped deep by the rains. It was far down in one of these I was lying, out of the wind. Glorious prospect, but for the mist that blotted out everything, valleys, loughs, plain and sea.
(100)

The narrator begins by indicating that “the place” will be described, and then crosses the act of description out with the phrase, “that's unimportant.”²⁹ The place, therefore, is indicated and then immediately put *sous rature* which creates a *blanc* space of nothingness – a white canvas upon which a more fully realized description of “the place” can be inscribed. What makes the description that follows more “real,” is not the seeking out of the infinite complexities of the scene, but the fact that the description contains

within it the *blanc* traces of the underlying failure to capture the “timeless” a-spatial thing that is the external world. In other words, Beckett inserts a *blanc* space into the image in order to give space to the infinite complexities of the world that exceed the limits of representation. Everything, therefore, is “blotted out” and put *sous rature* by the whiteness of “the mist” – that inescapable *blanc* space that underlies all perception and representation of the external world where the infinite complexities, although “timeless” and therefore nothing in relation to language, must be said to exist.

While *Proust* remains Beckett’s most thorough treatise on the “double-headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time,” one of the most important influences concerning the know-ability of time for Beckett is located in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.³⁰ Just as being is something that can be represented in language and yet cannot be given an accurate form due to the inadequacy of language in relation (and non-relation) to the essential self, so too does the language of time, as something that gives presence to being, also put the artificial experience of linear succession of time *sous rature*. In the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine notes that present time, when one seeks to identify it through measurement, is something that is essentially nothing. For example, this passage from the *Confessions* sheds light on the a-temporal *blanc* spaces that Beckett is seeking to represent in *Texts*:³¹

Now we can see that the present, which we found was the only one of the three divisions of time that could possibly be said to be long, has been whittled down to the space of scarcely one day. But here again we must look into the matter more closely, because not even the whole of one day is present... In fact, the only time that can be called present is an instant, if we can conceive of such, that cannot be divided even into the most minute fractions, and a point of time as small as this passes so rapidly from the future to the past that its duration is without length. For if its duration were

prolonged, it could be divided into past and future. When it is present it has no duration.³²

The problem that Saint Augustine considers is that present time, since it has no duration, can never be captured; the present passes faster than any means of measuring its temporal trajectory or velocity. So, if the past and the future, which might give dimension to the present, are nothingness, then present time, because it also has no clear dimensions as a result of the fact that its “duration is without length,” must exist as an unknown *blanc* space of nothingness (the presence of an absence). Similarly, in *Texts*, present time exists as one unknown temporal moment without duration or knowable presence: “I’d join them with a will if it could be here and now, how is it nothing is ever here and now? It’s varied, my life is varied, I’ll never get anywhere. I know, there is no one here, neither me nor anyone else, but some things are better left unsaid, so I say nothing” (123). The “here and now,” like that described in the *Confessions*, is never in fact, “here and now”: “An hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on what I meant by here, and me, and being, and there I never went looking for extravagant meanings, there I never much varied, only the here would sometimes seem to vary” (101).

If present time has no measurable duration, and therefore is an image of nothing, then the reader may infer that both language and time function like monadic mirrors that reflect the absence of God. “[A]ccording to Aristotle,” who, the narrator in “Texts 8” wryly notes, “knew everything” (134), “life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God.”³³ However, if time and language fail to give adequate expression to the “timeless” self of being, and being, language, and time are aspects of God, then Beckett

has put the idea of God, in *Texts*, *sous rature*. Indeed, as the narrator states, “Here at least none of that, no talk of a creator and nothing very definite in the way of creation” (107). Further, the act of putting God *sous rature* through the nothingness of being in time (which Beckett will develop later in *Lessness*) can be seen as the need to “create” a new language in which to identify the “timeless” self that is being. For Beckett, such an approach involves tracing being back to its Western origin, to “the beginning” where God gave shape to the *Logos* and breathed life into the world. As in *All Strange Away*, so in *Texts* Beckett expresses the need to put language *sous rature*, by crossing (or in this case blotting) language out to give rise to the *blanc* space of nothingness in order that a new language, and one that might be capable of articulating what the meaning of being is, can begin to take shape:

Blot, words can be blotted and the mad thoughts they invent, the nostalgia for the same slime where the Eternal breathed and his son wrote, long after, with divine idiotic finger, at the feet of the adulteress, wipe it out, all you have to do is say you said nothing and so say nothing. (124)

“Saying,” in this passage, “is inventing.” The need to put language *sous rature* by blotting the “Word” out is to give form to the underlying whiteness of the *blanc* spacing. The allusion to “the same slime where the Eternal breathed” will be used again by Beckett later in *How It Is*, where the protagonist crawls through the mud of language that signifies the chaos of the divided “Word” of God and the idea that God has been reduced to nostalgia. Here, the breath of God in the act of creating being is linked to the writings that contain the teachings of Christ which are done, as the narrator notes, with “divine idiotic finger” – a hostility that also includes the allusion to Mary Magdalene, “at the feet

of the adulteress.” As Beckett makes clear in this passage, the object of being is to “say nothing,” to “wipe it all out” in order that a new beginning and new writing can be begun.

While present time, because it is so small that it cannot be measured, is essentially nothing, Saint Augustine does go some way to solving the problem of the relationship between the past and the future and the issue of present time. Both past and future can attain form in the present through the “memory” of the past, and the “expectation” of the future. Therefore, present time, on the one hand, is like an extensionless point too small to be part of time, and yet on the other hand, it can contain the whole of time through past “memory” and future “expectation.” In *Texts*, although the present “here and now” is reduced to nothing, it also contains the whole of time: “And now here, what now here, one enormous second, as in Paradise, and the mind slow, slow, nearly stopped” (106). Present time has inflated into “one enormous second,” and thus, when the narrator seeks consolation through the voluntary memory of old stories, the past is integrated into his present experience. As in *The Calmative*, the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* provides the autobiographical memory of the heroic story “about Joe Breem, or Breen” in “Text 1”:

A tale, it was a tale for children, it all happened on a rock, in the storm, the mother was dead and gulls came beating against the light, Joe jumped into the sea, that’s all I remember, a knife between his teeth, did what had to be done and came back, that’s all I remember this evening, it ended happily, it began unhappily and it ended happily, every evening, a comedy, for children. Yes I was my father and I was my son, I asked myself questions and answered as best I could, I had it told to me evening after evening, the same old story I knew by heart and couldn’t believe. (103)

As John Pilling has observed, the “Joe Breem narrative is now seen for what it is, ‘a comedy, for children.’ The adult self obviously cannot solace itself with a structure

beginning unhappily and ending happily.”³⁴ As Beckett has made clear elsewhere, the subject is in a constant process of “decantation” – continuously being put *sous rature* by the passage of time – a progression that crosses the self out to provide the *blanc* space where the new self will be inscribed: “The subject has died,” Beckett says in *Proust*, “and perhaps many times – on the way.”³⁵ For the narrator in the above passage, these voices and stories from childhood have “no life in them” because they shed no light on the experience of the “timeless” self.

In “Text 2,” the world is seen from within the “ivory dungeon” of the skull that is the “different glass” (105) of a *blanc* space which divides the place containing the narrator from the memories of the people and things above in the light (similar to *How It Is*). Speaking of these images the narrator states: “If only it could be wiped from knowledge. To have suffered under that miserable light, what a blunder. It let nothing show” (106). Suffering under the “miserable light” in the world above is to experience the suffering caused by having “nothing show” – the inability of being to describe with any authority the experience of being in the world. Later, in “Text 5,” the narrator once again refers to the *blanc* space of the “glass” that divides being from itself:

the sky the earth, I’ve heard great accounts of them...I’ve noted, I must have noted many a story with them as setting, they create the atmosphere. Between them where the hero stands a great gulf is fixed, while all about they flow together more and more, till they meet, so that he finds himself as it were under a glass. (118-9)

In the passage above, the narrator is speaking of the inability to represent being or the experience of being in the natural world. Between being and world “a great gulf is fixed,” which echoes Schopenhauer’s statement concerning the three forms of perception (space,

time and causality) which create a “deep gulf between the ideal and the real.”³⁶ The “gulf,” of which both Schopenhauer and Beckett speak, is the spacing that exists between the self and the other, between the hero and the narrator, between being and the world. This *blanc* space of the gulf is “the glass” in *Texts* or the “bar’s rest” that reveals the inability of being to account for its “timeless” self or the “timeless” world in any complete way through language, which Beckett posits as the very space of nothingness – “the space that intervenes between him [poet/being] and the world of objects.”³⁷ This “space that intervenes” is the need to express the *blanc* space of nothing that problematizes the ability of the writer to describe being itself accurately. It is the accommodation of this very space that brings being closer to the “real” as opposed to the “ideal” (speaking here in terms of Schopenhauer) representation of the experience of being through giving form to all that which remains outside of knowledge as the “hieroglyphics” of the “ideal real” of nothing.

The inability of the self to return to the past in any meaningful way through memories in *Texts* also involves a situation similar to that found in the play *That Time* (1976). *That Time* tells the tale of Listener reviewing the memories of his life in a tripartite structure (similar to *How It Is*) involving A in middle age, B in youth, and C in old age. Throughout, Beckett’s objective is to represent the fractured relationship between the self and the series of others that Listener has been over a lifetime. During *That Time*, Listener refers to each of the individuals that he was as “you,” which sees Beckett reconsidering the idea that he expressed in his essay, *Proust*, concerning the individual not as static but in a constant process of change (as a series of others). Listener begins:

A: that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child when was that [Eyes close.] grey day took the eleven to the end of the line and on from there no no trams when all gone long ago that time you went back to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child that last time not a tram left in the place only the old rails when was that (228)

As a boy, Listener would escape from the boredom of the company of adults and seek out a place called Foley's Folly. Later, in middle age, he attempts to return to these ruins, but the train station is no longer taking people there – the return journey back in time to a previous self is impossible. The past of the subject is in ruins, and it is the folly of being to attempt to return to that place where the self once existed. The return to the past is always a return to nothingness, to a space that is present and the past self that is forever after absent. *Texts* is the germ of the same idea. The journey is one, like the structure of the text and the end of words, that cannot be anything like a complete rotation. The self cannot return to the place (or space) of the past because it is no longer the same self that was there originally. Therefore, the narrator of "Text 7" recounts the ill-fated excursion that is Beckett's representation of the impossible return to a past self that is now other: "and the station in ruins where I sit waiting, erect and rigid, hands on thighs, the tip of the ticket between finger and thumb, for a train that will never come, never go... through the glass black with the dust of ruin" (129).

The experience of that space in that time is the object of the journey. However, as Beckett seeks to suggest, the being that once was is no longer; it has been put *sous rature* and therefore has "vanished" into the mists of time. The train does not lead back to Foley's Folly; the journey does not signify a return to the points in the past that once existed.

“This ticket,” as the narrator states, is not “valid for life.” In both *That Time* and here in *Texts*, it is a unified sense of being that is in fact the actual destination – a destination that is essentially a fabrication and therefore unattainable:

It's not me in any case, I'm not talking of me, when there's X, that paradigm of human kind, moving at will, complete with joys and sorrows, perhaps even a wife and brats, forebears most certainly, a carcass in God's image and a contemporary skull, but above all endowed with movement, that's what strikes you above all, with his likeness so easy to take and his so instructive soul, that really, no, to talk of oneself, when there's X, no (128)

The return to being is the “X” on the map and the end of the journey. In traditional literature, the archetype of the journey is the circle which is defined as the “homecoming” where the hero, attains his true self.³⁸ The journey home is achievable, and it is synonymous with the return to the true self. However, in *Texts*, the train never leaves the station, the journey has been put *sous rature* and the self is not one but many, all bound up as nothingness: “what's to be said of this latest other, with his babble of homeless mes and untenanted hims, this other without number or person whose abandoned being we haunt, nothing” (150).³⁹ “Departures, stories, they are not for tomorrow. And the voices, wherever they come from, have no life in them” (3). Being, as the narrator suggests, can only be represented, and then that representation crossed out (“X”) and put *sous rature* in order to fully recognize the destination that is nothingness.

Therefore, while allusions to nothing and nothingness in *Texts for Nothing* remain important, it is the ways in which Beckett structures the text and its language that allow the reader to see the *blanc* spaces of nothing scattered throughout the narratives. Indeed, it is only by recognizing these spaces that the connection between *Texts* and the later

“residua” short prose becomes clear. Beckett will use *Texts* as the means to continuously enlarge these spaces of nothing throughout the later “residua,” even as the narratives themselves diminish, a fact that is clear when one considers the structure of Beckett’s final novel-length work, *How It Is* (English translation of *Comment c’est* 1961). *How It Is* shows this disintegration in-progress, as the *blanc* spaces of nothingness become as important as the words heard and recorded by Krim and Kram. While the importance of the *blanc* is clear in *How It Is*, Beckett’s objective in that narrative lies in the further development of writing *sous rature*. In the chapter that follows, it is through writing *sous rature* that Beckett develops a dialogic structuring to *How It Is* which allows him to represent the self not as unitary (monologic) but divided (dialogic), as the voice of the self is continuously put *sous rature* by the voice of the other. The identification the dialogics and the writing *sous rature* that Beckett undertakes in *How It Is* allows for a radical reassessment of the “voice in me not mine,” signifying another important step towards the “residua” texts of the 1960s.

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* in *Nohow On: Company/ Ill Seen Ill Said/ Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1996), p. 89.

² Samuel Beckett, "German Letter to Axel Kaun," in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Inc., 1983), p. 172. All future references are to this edition.

³ *Texts for Nothing* was published in a different order than the way in which they appear. According to Ruby Cohn, "3,6,10 were first published in May, 1953; 11 in July, 1953; 1 and 12 in May, 1955, six months before the thirteen appeared in book form – all and always for nothing." *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 221.

⁴ Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," *New York Times*, 6 May 1956, Sec. 2, x, 1, 3.

⁵ While John Pilling has noted the variable quality of *Texts*, he has also expressed his concern that the title and the comments offered by John Fletcher (see information in endnote below) might be read to imply that they are void of artistic merit. While Pilling is one of only two scholars to examine the texts individually, this chapter will seek to establish their merit by revealing the ways in which these texts look forward towards the later "residua" prose.

⁶ Porter Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: the Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 94. All future references are to this edition.

⁷ Indeed, this position is strengthened by the fact that when the thirteen *Texts* were translated into English in the late 1960s, they were collected together with a number of the other 1960s "residua" in *No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967). The title *No's Knife* is taken from "Text 13" where the narrator states, "and unslakable infinity of remorse delving ever deeper in its bite, at having to hear, having to say, fainter than the faintest murmur, so many lies, so many times the same lie lying denied, whose the screaming silence of no's knife in yes's wound" (p.154).

⁸ For a discussion of the relation between *Texts* and *The Unnamable*, see, for example, Eric P. Levy, "Texts for Nothing: Farewell to Being" in *Beckett and the Voice of Species: A Study of the Prose Fiction* (Towota, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1980), p. 72-83.

⁹ P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Being: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Murphy writes, "There is much less emphasis upon the expression of the void in *Texts for Nothing* that the title has misleadingly led the reader to expect... Nothing cannot mean in this instance the absolute negation of which the 'Three Dialogues' spoke," p. 34. There are a number of

questionable ideas being suggested here. Most notable is the fact that it is explicitly the intention of Beckett to use the idea of “nothing” expressed in the *Three Dialogues* as the template for the search to identify the “timeless” self that is unknown, and therefore exists outside of the limits of language. Therefore, the nothing that Beckett speaks of in the *Three Dialogues* is in fact a positive something, not an absolute negation. To speak of the “timeless” self, in other words, even if it is nothing, is to make it something, which is exactly the position taken up in *Watt*: “But to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill...For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man.” Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 77.

¹⁰ John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 196.

¹¹ Because nothingness in *Texts* has not been considered in terms of the *blanc* spaces that Beckett situates to indicate the limits of language to express the experience of being, past critics have sought to discover a way out of this “impasse” through examining the term “Text.” According to Ruby Cohn, “More difficult to explain is Beckett’s use of the word “text” for both poetry and prose. “Text” has several possible meanings: the Latin sense of literary tissue or style, the scriptural idea of theme, or simply the wording of something written.” Ruby Cohn in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 169. I would suggest that the decision to use the word text was simply to avoid saying “Story” twice, which is what Beckett referred to the *Novellas* as in the same collection. Further, the narrator in *Texts for Nothing* states that, “There has to be one, it seems, once there is speech, no need of a story, a story is not compulsory, just a life, that’s the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough” p. 116. Given this comment, it would seem that *Text for Nothing* might mean *Life for Nothing*.

¹² Samuel Beckett, “Imagination Dead Imagine,” in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 182.

¹³ At the conclusion of “Le Concentrisme,” Beckett speaks of great art as being “perfectly intelligible” and “perfectly inexplicable.” Organized according to specific patterns, language, for example, communicates and is “intelligible,” in that the reader can recognize and thus identify the individual meanings of the words being used by the writer. And yet, what it is communicating *en masse* in terms of an overall meaning through the relation of one word to another (and indeed to all others) can remain a mystery (the underlying “hieroglyphics”) and as such, “inexplicable.”

¹⁴ In *Beckett Writing Beckett*, Porter Abbott offers a different approach to this structuring which still maintains the importance of the *blanc*: “In this new departure, the *un*-quest or absolute of nonnarrative – that is, the twelve gaps between the texts – is as important as the texts themselves. The importance of these gaps is at once ontological and metaphysical, for they represent that absence out of which something keeps miraculously coming...the gaps give fresh emphasis to the way words erupt, ever the same, yet always

with bizarre strokes of difference. There is no end to this, only new *beginnings*" (italics mine). p. 94.

¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, "The Lost Ones," in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 213.

¹⁶ J.E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 75. In fact, the narrator of "Text 11" repeats the same words as the narrator in Text 1 "I shouldn't have begun."

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, "All Strange Away," in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 170. All future references are to this edition.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, "German Letter to Axel Kaun" in *Disjecta*. Speaking of Gertrude Stein, Beckett writes, "At least the texture of language has become porous..." p. 172.

¹⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Ping*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 193.

²⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (Grove Press, 1959), p. 77.

²¹ Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 27. All future references are to this edition.

²² Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/ Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p. 221. All future references are to this edition.

²³ Samuel Beckett, *All Strange Away*, the narrator states, "unsupported interjections, ancient Greek philosophers ejaculated with place of origin when possible suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period, completed propositions such as..." p. 175.

²⁴ Samuel Beckett, "German Letter," p. 172.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 386.

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 66

²⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 4

²⁹ The phrase, "that's unimportant," may also be the indifference that Geulincx encourages. See in particular, John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 115.

³⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 1.

³¹ At the opening of the *Physics*, Aristotle writes, “time, whether limitless or any given length of time we take, is entirely made up of the no-longer and not-yet; and how can we conceive of that which is composed of non-existents sharing in existence in any way?” (218a). While Aristotle goes on to consider the relation between time and movement, Augustine accepts that past and future do not exist. However, for him, the idea is that the past and future be measured through our memory of the past, and our expectation of the future, that both exist in the present. Aristotle, *Physics* (Loeb Classical Library, 1929).

³² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 265-6.

³³ Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), xii, 7. p. 880.

³⁴ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull*, p. 46.

³⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 3.

³⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), Book II, p. 400.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett, “Recent Irish Poetry” in *Disjecta*, p. 70.

³⁸ Speaking of the return of the hero and the homecoming as the arrival of the hero to his (traditionally speaking) rightful place is the archetypal pattern established in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus sheds his disguise and attains his rightful place in society alongside Penelope. However, this is not to suggest that the homecoming signifies a permanent static arrival. The end of the journey always signifies the return to the beginning of the journey and therefore a new journey, and as such a new individual.

³⁹ Concerning this passage, Susan Brienza notes, “Here Beckett self-consciously employs the grammatical classifications ‘person’ and ‘number’ to depict this pronoun with no noun to back it up. Use of a pronoun implies a noun referent, but our narrator is never given a name...so that all his pronouns falsely refer to a nothing. Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett’s New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*, p. 22.

CHAPTER THREE

Towards *Sous Rature*: Beckett, Bakhtin and the Dialogics of *How It Is*

It must not be forgotten, sometimes I forget, that all that is a question of voices. I say what I am told to say, in the hope that some day they will weary of talking at me. The trouble is I say it wrong, having no ear, no head, no memory... Do they believe it is I who am speaking?¹

Sometimes I say to myself, they say to me, Worm says to me, the subject matters little, that my purveyors are more than one, four or five. But it's more likely the same foul brute all the time, amusing himself pretending to be a many, varying his register, his tone, his accent and his drivel. Unless it comes natural to him. A bare and rusty hook I might accept. But all these titbits!²

While Beckett considered *Texts for Nothing* a failed attempt to extricate himself from the creative impasse that he experienced following the completion of *The Unnamable*, *Texts* hints at the new narrative possibility of expressing the limits of language through writing *sous rature*. For Beckett, writing *sous rature* – the act of writing and then crossing that writing out – not only reveals language to be an inadequate tool to represent the “timeless” self of being, but puts the image of being itself *sous rature*, allowing Beckett to represent being not in absolute terms, but as divided between the known and the unknown, as something that is at the same time nothing. The consequences of the failure to respond to Beckett’s technique of writing *sous rature* in the later prose texts are no more apparent than in *How It Is*, where critics have continued to interpret the narrative as a monologue presented by the narrator through the narrated “voice in me not mine” that speaks from within him.³ What critics have failed to see is that Beckett is less concerned with the experience of the narrator than with the experience of the “voice in me not mine” itself. The phrase, “voice in me not mine,” applies more to the experience of the “narrated” voice as it constantly constructs its discourse with a “sideways glance”

towards the narrator's voice, anticipating and incorporating his responses and opinions into the "little fabric" of its own discourse. Therefore, identifying the presence of the other voice from within the "voice in me not mine" not only serves to reveal the shortcomings of monologic readings of *How It Is*, but more importantly, the ways in which Beckett's form of writing *sous rature* produces a thoroughly dialogic discourse that culminates in questions of belief in a Christian God.

Throughout *How It Is*, the ongoing production of writing *sous rature* allows for the identification of the divided dialogic structure of the "voice in me not mine," which reveals itself each time it incorporates the voice of the narrator into its discourse. For example, at the conclusion of the narrative, the "voice in me not mine" incorporates the voice of the narrator which clearly situates the "voice in me not mine" as the site of a dialogic conflict each time it is put *sous rature*.⁴ When this conflict arises, the voice of the other is integrated into its discourse:

alone in the mud *yes* the dark *yes* sure *yes* panting *yes* some one hears me
no no one hears me *no* murmuring sometimes *yes* when the panting stops
yes not at other times *no* in the mud *yes* to the mud *yes* my voice *yes* mine
yes not another's *no* mine alone *yes* sure *yes* when the panting stops *yes* on
 an off *yes* a few words *yes* a few scraps *yes* that no one hears *no* but less
 and less *no* answer LESS AND LESS *yes*⁵ (*italics mine*)

This passage, which reads more like an interrogation, involves a dialogue between the two voices located within the "voice in me not mine," and is clearly presented as though it were written within invisible quotation marks.⁶ Indeed, throughout *How It Is*, the complexities of Beckett's construction of this form of dialogue can be most profitably elucidated through what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "dialogics." Like the divided

structure of the “voice in me not mine,” a dialogic discourse is essentially a discourse containing two semantic positions or “voices in conflict” within a single “utterance,” which, as above, produces “invisible quotation marks” around a specific word or set of words that suggest the incorporation of another’s speech. By writing the voice of the narrator into the “voice in me not mine,” Beckett is able to represent the voice of the self *sous rature* – written and crossed out – which reveals the problem of representing the identity of the “timeless” self which is produced through the as yet unidentified dialogic structure of the narrative.

Employing the tools of traditional stylistics, critics have maintained that the main reason why the “voice in me not mine,” as recorded by Krim and Kram on “ebonite,” is “truly changeable” is that, like the self-reflexivity that constitutes the narratives of *Malone Dies* (1956), *The Unnamable* (1958), and *All Strange Away* (1964),⁷ “it freely contradicts and revises itself.”⁸ Indeed, this argument of contradictions and revisions serves only to reinforce the premise of the monologue and the more traditional examinations of the narrative’s discourse. However, because the “voice in me not mine” is aware of the presence of the narrator through whom it speaks, it anticipates the narrator’s responses, and in doing so, vocalizes the voice of the narrator from within its own discourse, which in turn puts the “voice in me not mine,” *sous rature*. For example, in “part one before Pim,” the words of the “voice in me not mine” split and house two speakers speaking simultaneously from within one voice: “almost clinging *that’s too strong*” (55, italics mine); while later, in “part three,” a similar example is produced: “so eternally I quote on *something lost there* so eternally now Bom now Pim *something wrong there* according as

left or right north or south tormentor or victim *these words too strong*" (115, italics mine). Bakhtin refers to such dialogic "double-voiced" encounters as "hidden polemics" in which,

...the other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author's discourse. This radically changes the semantics of the discourse involved: alongside its referential meaning there appears a second meaning – an intentional orientation toward someone else's words.⁹

A "hidden polemic," Bakhtin continues, is a "self-depreciating overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes."¹⁰ In *How It Is*, the "voice in me not mine" speaks with a similar double-orientation, always casting a "sideways glance" towards the voice of the narrator and incorporating this other voice into its discourse. Indeed, speaking of the images in the mud, the "voice in me not mine" divides into two dialogical voices through a shift in tense which also introduces a "hidden polemic": "the kind I see sometimes see in the mud part one sometimes saw," "what else can I do could I do," or from past to present, "how it was how it is," while at times anticipating contradiction, "I am right I was wrong." In each case, the reader is meant to hear the "self-styled voice" of the narrator as it is incorporated into, and puts *sous rature*, the "voice in me not mine" through the dialogics of these "hidden polemics."

At the conclusion of "Dante and the Lobster," in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Belacqua states his position concerning the death of the lobster: "it's a quick death, God help us all." This is followed by the narrator's hostile rejoinder, "It is not."¹¹ While the phrase, "It is not" is clearly the narrator's, this voice remains both inside and outside the discourse in the text,

undermining the autonomy and the realism of the text through this omniscient observation. In *How It Is*, a more elaborate example of Beckett's use of the rejoinder to signal to the reader the presence and incorporation of the narrator into the "voice in me not mine" appears in "part three after Pim." Here, the "voice in me not mine" itself poses and "claims someone else's discourse as its own," as it incorporates "the self-styled voice" of the narrator into its voice and words, creating a double-voiced dialogic encounter.¹² What makes this example unique is that Beckett constructs the dialogic discourse to look like dialogue, complete with invisible quotation marks:

whereas the voice as we have seen peculiar to part three or seven or eleven
or fifteen so on just as the couple to part two or four or six or eight so on

correct

assuming one prefers the order here proposed namely one the journey two
the couple three the abandon to that to those to be obtained by starting
with the abandon and ending with the journey by way of the couple or by
starting with the couple and ending with the

with the couple

by way of the abandon

or of the journey

correct

something wrong there (116-7, italics mine)

Beckett structures this fractured discourse (and a number of other examples like it) to appear like dialogue. The "voice in me not mine" is speaking and incorporating the voice of the narrator into its own discourse, and in each case puts the autonomy of its own voice *sous rature*. While both voices are focussed on the logic of the journey, it is through this series of rejoinders that the "changeable" "voice in me not mine" reacts

dialogically to the reasoning of the narrator. As the “voice in me not mine” attempts to “make sense” of the organization of the voice, its initial statement is verified by clothing the discourse of the narrator in the authoritative intonation of the rejoinder “correct.” Further, the dialogics are intensified to represent the structuring of dialogue as the narrator appears to interrupt the narrating “voice in me not mine,” stating, “with the couple.” The repetition of the phrase “with the” houses two distinct voices before the statement is completed with the word “couple.” Finally, the “self-styled voice” undermines the entire project of constructing an artificial order to both the voice and the entire narrative by stating, “something wrong there.” As such, Beckett clearly gives the other “self-styled voice” of the narrator presence through the difference in intonation that divides the “voice in me not mine” into a dialogic interaction between two distinct voices. The voice and the words used are therefore divided between two speakers engaged in dialogue, and divided by invisible quotation marks that contribute, through this interaction, to further obscure the underlying “timeless” self.

In *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, Susan Brienza provides a thorough catalogue of the vast array of literary and philosophical echoes that are contained within *How It Is*, stating at one point, “Like Winnie with her fragments of misquoted poetry in *Happy Days*, the narrator in *How It Is* sprinkles his prose with classical allusions; and since these literary fragments span the centuries our timeless narrator can represent all human beings and all writers.”¹³ However, such allusions in *How It Is* are more complex than simple repeated examples of misquotation, and of the narrator as an image of “all writers.” While Beckett posits the presence of two voices within the words of the “voice in me not mine” which

integrates the “self-styled voice” of the narrator into its discourse, he is also, through trawling his knowledge of literary allusions, undertaking a dialogic project similar to that of the “voice in me not mine.” The life of language is not static – as Beckett makes clear with his protagonist crawling through the mud – but is set in motion by the transference of the word from one mouth to another, from generation to generation and from narrative to narrative through the mud of discourses that have accumulated over “vast tracts of time.” According to Bakhtin, this echoing of other literary sources by an author is a special form of “stylization”:

the author may also make use of someone else’s discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own. Such a discourse, in keeping with its task, must be perceived as belonging to someone else. In one discourse, two semantic intentions appear, two voices.¹⁴

For Bakhtin, stylization is an example of “passive double-voiced words” where an author incorporates another author’s discourse into a narrative without entering into direct conflict with that other author’s language. Stylization attains its dialogic, “double-voicing principle” because the voice of one author, for example, can be heard to speak within another author’s discourse. Therefore, where Joyce believed that perfection could be had by simply rearranging words, Beckett reveals in *How It Is* that the evolution and transformation of words and language are always due to their double-voicedness. The examples of stylization occur on nearly every page. When Dante’s “Abandon hope all ye who enter here” from the *Inferno* becomes in *How It Is*, “abandon hope gleam of hope frantic departure” and “abandoned here effect of hope” (46) the reader hears two voices – Beckett and then Dante – within each phrase. The voice of Descartes, “I think therefore I am,” is heard within the phrase “a word from me and I am again” which divides the

words into two speakers – Beckett and Descartes – speaking simultaneously. In another example, the reader hears Biblical language but is conscious that the words belong to Beckett: “the earth must have been on fire when I see us we are already at hand,” “this old kiln destroyed by fire and in all this tenement.” Beckett employs a technique that resembles the “double-voicing” of “stylistics” by echoing “someone else’s discourse for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own.”¹⁵ By doing so, Beckett reveals that the life of the word is always one in transformation, as the voices of the self and the other clash and conflict, the very sounding and resounding of which allows their dialogic quality to be heard.

Since the “voice in me not mine” is the chaotic “changeable” “never the same voice twice” discourse to which the narrator alludes, the story which the “voice in me not mine” tells of the protagonist crawling through the mud, is a metaphorical image of itself – of the “voice in me not mine.” Indeed, according to Bakhtin, “the image of man is the image of language,” or more precisely the image of “languages,” and, similarly, in *How It Is*, the epic journey of the “word” is represented by the recounted story of the protagonist moving east to west like writing across a page, and casting himself – “I personify it, it personifies itself” – as an image of language. The image of the protagonist travelling through the mud represents the voice of the writer, personified by writing that flows across the page. The mud constitutes the “blackened margins” of the “great confusion” of words – the “voice[s] in me not mine” – from the stylization of other’s voices that have made their way into his discourse, while the *blanc* spaces between words represent the

spaces where the “voice in me not mine” has been put *sous rature*. Indeed, in the fragmentary narrative *L’Image* (which was the first attempt at what would become *How It Is*), Beckett describes the movement of the protagonist through the mud as a metaphor for the hand writing across the page:

qui sont d’un bon secours même rasant les murs sous le ciel changeant je devais être malin déjà elle ne doit pas être bien loin un mètre à peine mais je la sens loin un jour elle s’en ira toute seule sur ses quatre doigts en comptant le pouce car il en manque un pas le pouce et me quittera je la vois qui jette ses quatre doigts en avant comme des grappins les bouts s’enfoncent tirent et ainsi elle s’éloigne par petits rétablissements horizontaux c’est ce que j’aime¹⁶

This description of the movement of the hand is synonymous with the movement of the protagonist traveling through the mud. In *How It Is*, the protagonist as described by the narrated “voice in me not mine,” is the experience of the “voice in me not mine” as it is written across the page by Krim and Kram the listener and scribe. On his journey he encounters the language of others “over vast tracts of time” that are taken in, and serve to put the voice of the self *sous rature*, problematizing the search for the voice of the self that is buried somewhere within.

Krim and Kram, who listen and write the text that we read, are contentious recorders of everything from the pauses to the *blanc* spaces that fracture the speech of the “voice in me not mine” as the narrator gasps for breath.¹⁷ As a result, during the times when he is literally speech-less, the narrator is unable to articulate parts of the “voice in me not mine” before being able once again to rejoin the voice already in progress. While these *blanc* sections which divide the “voice in me not mine” from itself become little more than “fundamental sound,” they do, in a sense, contain language; however, that language,

while spoken, remains unheard and therefore unread, leaving only nothing: “all white in the whiteness.”¹⁸ Indeed, while the protagonist in *How It Is* must crawl through the black mud of chaotic languages, the reader, conversely, must begin to acclimatize to the *blanc* spaces of nothing that are a result of putting the “voice in me not mine” *sous rature* due to the condition of language as unable to represent the “timeless” self. Further, since it is most specifically Kram whom creates the text of the “voice in me not mine,” it is significant that in “part three,” the voice states, “or no Kram that too when the panting stops” (134). The voice puts Kram *sous rature*, and given that Kram is the scribe, in doing so, crosses the writing of the narrative out, and creates a text that is essentially a *blanc* space of nothing.

While the literary allusions fuel the “double-voicing” that is at work in *How It Is*, other examples of stylization are most specifically intended to be read as “double-voicing” discourse from within the “voice in me not mine.” Indeed, in *How It Is*, Beckett colonizes “bits from other plays” through a number of allusions to Shakespeare, which include such examples as *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*.¹⁹ While all of these allusions are dialogic, in that they once again reveal the double-voicing of stylization – this time between Beckett and Shakespeare – in the passage cited below, Beckett employs Hamlet’s famous soliloquy in order to re-represent it as thoroughly dialogic – a passage written in “midget grammar” (76) – that speaks to the image of being as an image of an amalgamations of time and therefore in a sense, as “timeless.” This example of stylization produces a dialogic conflict between the “voice in me not mine” and the integration of the hostile rejoinder of the narrator:

a little less of no matter what no matter how no matter when a little less of
to be present past future and conditional of to be and not to be come come
 enough of that on and end part one before Pim (38, italics mine)

In the “above,” Hamlet’s soliloquy becomes a refracting “mirror” of the voice in *How It Is*. Here, as in the narrative itself, it is only the appearance of a monologue which masks the forces of a dialogic conflict. This “double-voiced” passage undermines the unity of the voice, forcing it to split into a dialogic conflict where the reader is clearly being made aware of two speakers speaking. Most specifically, the unity of Hamlet’s monologue is crossed out by the substitution of “and” for “or,” suggesting that “to be” is “not to be” one voice “or” another, but one voice “and” another infinitely. As well, Beckett deconstructs the appearance of a monologic discourse by linking the “condition” of the “voice in me not mine” to the play of languages; he is not one voice and not one language, but the chaotic intersection of the dialogues from “present,” “past,” and “future” voices that only obscure instead of reveal the “timeless.” Most importantly, the “voice in me not mine” once again reveals how “changeable” it is; the reaction of the voice of the narrator losing his patience with this form of linguistic stylization, is integrated into the narrating “voice in me not mine” as he states, “come come enough of that on and end part one before Pim.” The hostile force of this polemic rejoinder therefore melds two voices together into one voice – narrator and narrated – splitting the words between them, as the narrator’s voice is integrated into the “voice in me not mine.”

Because the narrator cannot keep up with the flow of the narrated voice, fragmentary dialogue actually exists between the “voice in me not mine” and another speaker who remains absent and unrecorded by Krim and Kram. In “part two with Pim,” the “voice in

me not mine” once again reveals that it is “changeable” and “never the same voice twice” as a fragment of a conversation is heard in the second part of the passage cited below:

BOM scored by finger-nail athwart the arse the vowel in the hole I would say in a scene from my life he would oblige me to have had a life *the Boms sir you don't know the Boms sir you can shit on a Bom sir you can't humiliate him a Bom sir the Boms sir* (60, italics mine)

According to Bakhtin, such examples of fractured dialogue are dialogic, and when enacted as they are in the passage above are most specifically examples of “hidden dialogicality.” In fact, in his description of “hidden dialogicality,” Bakhtin could well be speaking of what Beckett is doing in this passage: “We [sometimes] sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person.”²⁰ By examining the fragment of the conversation that has survived here in *How It Is*, the reader can piece together the omitted voice that has actually survived.²¹ The voice belonging to another, in other words, has been put *sous rature* – is absent – and yet achieves presence as it is integrated into the “voice in me not mine” which houses the two voices simultaneously, enmeshed in a dialogic interaction.²²

Beckett not only employs various techniques that are consistent with Bakhtin’s discourse on dialogics; he also includes within *How It Is* clear examples of dialogue that put the premise of the monologue and the unified self *sous rature*. Indeed, the emphasis concerning the fact that the “voice in me not mine” is “changeable,” is indicative of the fact that the “voice in me not mine” wears the guises of different voices that are

represented by changes in the intonation of its voice. The clearest method by which the “voice in me not mine” employs intonation in order to reveal the fact that its voice is “changeable” is through parody. According to Bakhtin, parody introduces a “varidirectional passive double-voiced word,” in that the voice divides into a dialogic conflict between one voice that describes, and an ulterior intonation that indicates a second voice expressing an opposite point of view. Therefore, parody “has a twofold direction – it is directed both towards the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another’s discourse, toward someone else’s speech.”²³ Reminiscent of the chapter “Love and Lethe” in *More Pricks than Kicks*, the “voice in me not mine” describes an “image” that takes place “in April or in May” at a “racecourse,” and then quickly shifts to “a mountain of modest elevation,” where “endearments” of love are “exchanged” between *two* characters:²⁴

suddenly we are eating sandwiches alternate bites I mine she hers and
exchanging endearments *my sweet girl* I bite she swallows *my sweet boy*
 she bites I swallow we don’t yet coo with our bills full (29, italics mine)

Even though the passage appears to belong only to the narrated “voice in me not mine,” the “image” is a congested intersection of different voices engaged both in dialogue and – through parody – in a dialogic conflict. At its most basic level, the “voice in me not mine” reveals that it is “changeable” as it divides into two distinct intonations – the voice of the boy, and the voice of the girl – representing as a result, an example of a dialogue. Situated behind this dialogue, however, is a dialogic interaction involving the intonation of a “varidirectional” parodic voice that conflicts with the serious nature of romantic literature. As such, the way in which this image “from the light” is described, suggests that the reader is intended to hear the underlying intonation of the parodic voice “that is

directly opposed” to the serious voice of romance. Through the representation of the characters as grotesque, the pretensions of the romantic genre are mocked and a dialogic conflict is produced as Beckett enmeshes the serious and the comic together.

While Beckett offers examples of the way in which the autonomy of the “voice in me not mine” is “changeable,” as it is put *sous rature* each time it takes on the discourse of two separate voices speaking, he also crosses out the unity of the monologue in *How It Is* through parodying theatre discourse. In this example, a dialogue between Krim and Kram is recorded and reported by the “voice in me not mine”:

Krim dead you are mad one doesn't die here and with that with his long index claw Kram shaken pierces the mud two little flues to the skins then to Krim right for you they are warm Krim to Kram roles reversed it's the mud Kram we'll leave them open and see one year two years Kram's finger skins still warm

Kram I cannot credit it let us take their temperature Kram no need the skin is rosy Krim rosy are you mad Kram they are warm and rosy there it is we are nothing and we are rosy good moments not a doubt (93)

Beckett not only reveals in this passage that *How It Is* cannot be interpreted as monologic, but also forces the reader to hear the voice that is speaking as it parodies the dialogue between Krim and Kram and structures it into a form resembling theatrical discourse.²⁵ While this is certainly an image of a dialogue, the voices of Krim and Kram occupy the same voice as the “voice in me not mine.” In other words, the reader hears the “voice in me not mine,” and from within that voice, the voices of Krim and Kram are produced through changes in intonation. As such, the voice in *How It Is* becomes

dialogically charged, fracturing the unity of its form and revealing the way in which it is “changeable” through the interaction of the reader.

The dialogics of the “voice in me not mine,” however, attains its greatest import as Beckett’s tool for a theological commentary on the stature of the “Word” of God. Indeed, the dialogic nature of the “Word” is implicit in the original French title *Comment c’est* (1961) – a homophonic pun on the word “commencer,” conflating “how it is” and “to begin,” and recalling the biblical phrase “in the beginning.”²⁶ The opening of Genesis reads, “In the beginning the earth was without form and void,” and these words are echoed in the opening of St. John: “In the beginning was the Word.” Beckett’s correlation of the pun with the Bible further suggests the narrator’s infamous comment in *Murphy*: “What but an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of the chaos. In the beginning was the pun. And so on.”²⁷ For Beckett, the only explanation for the metaphysical experience of being constructed through the discourse of others who put the self *sous rature*, is that the unified “Word” was actually a “pun” – a divided speech act, articulating two different voices and meanings from within one voice.

Beckett demonstrates that the word “love” is itself ensconced in a “varidirectional” “double-voiced” conflict while drawing the parallel to the Biblical teachings of love synonymous with God (as in *Not I*, where Mouth’s childhood belief is that “God is love”). In this thinly disguised autobiographical account of a picture that Beckett posed for as a young boy, the love that the mother exhibits towards the child is compromised by the adult’s/Beckett’s retrospective ambivalence concerning the existence of God. As

such, the purity of the term “love” is crossed out and written *sous rature*, revealing within it a second voice of hostility which serves to put into question the benevolence of God. The “voice in me not mine” begins by describing the “image” of the mother as seen from the perspective of the child:

The huge head hatted with birds and flowers is bowed down over my curls
the eyes burn with severe love I offer her mine pale upcast to the sky
whence cometh our help and I know perhaps even then with time will pass
away

In a word upright on a cushion on my knees whelmed in a nightshirt I pray
according to her instructions (15)

The adult’s outwardly manifested skepticism concerning the benevolence of God impacts negatively on the love the mother feels towards the child. As such, instead of unconditional love, hers is a “severe love” based upon the condition of the child’s exhibiting unquestioning belief in God, that even as a child he knew would, “with time...pass away.” Thus, the underlying irony of the passage is inescapable; God teaches love, the mother prays to and worships God, and yet the love she exhibits to the child is a dialogic intersection infused with an underlying hostility. The failure of an unconditional love is the failure of God to supply the “help” promised in *Psalms* 121:1 (“from whence cometh my help”), whether directly or through the child’s mother. The “Word” of love is therefore not unified but divided between the voice of love and the threatening hostility towards the object of love.²⁸ Thus, the divided nature of being represented in the “voice in me not mine” allows Beckett to illustrate the paradoxical double-edged (s)word of Christian belief that is the origin of the dis-unified self. Throughout *How It Is*, the

monologic “Word” itself is represented as inherently dialogic, putting its own unity *sous rature* as it enters into conflict with itself.

As a result, theological allusions in *How It Is* stress the dialogic interplay between belief and the articulation of an underlying doubt in a benevolent Christian God. As the narrated “voice in me not mine” considers whether or not Pim “talks to himself,” dialogical clashes between the “voice in me not mine” and the voice of the narrator recur over issues of belief in a series of yes/no dialogues reminiscent of what earlier was an attempt to identify the condition of the self. Pim’s belief in God is put under intense scrutiny in this passage, for example:

if he talks to himself no thinks no believes in God yes everyday no wishes to die yes but doesn’t expect to no he expects to stay where he is yes flat as a cowclap on his belly yes in the mud yes without motion yes without thought yes eternally yes (97)

Speaking of this passage, Victor Sage states that it “could be rewritten as dialogue without loss of effect, if it were not for the indeterminacy of the point of view. We have the illusion (or the possibility) of simultaneous dialogue and monologue.”²⁹ However, the “indeterminacy” which veils the two voices – the narrated “voice in me not mine,” absorbing the skepticism of the narrator into its discourse – forces the narrated voice to accurately trace the path from unmitigated belief to belief enmeshed with the voice of doubt. As a result, the unmitigated belief is crossed out by the voice of doubt, introducing a dialogic conflict that puts the unity of belief *sous rature*.

Through such dialogic interaction in *How It Is*, belief in an ordering Christian God clearly belongs to the past, to the innocence of youth that has been subverted by the dialogics and doubts of other voices: “that belief the feeling since then ten eleven that belief said to have been mine the feeling since then vast stretch of time that I’d find it again the blue cloak the pigeon the miracles he understood” (70). The phrase, “said to have been mine,” reveals the way in which other opinions and therefore other voices from the past were integrated into the discourse of the “voice in me not mine,” while the lingering doubt collides with this faith, and produces the dialogic conflict. Indeed, as Mary Bryden points out, the belief in God and an ordered cosmos in *How It Is* have both been reduced to “nostalgia,” as reflections on the past have turned “the belief the blue the miracles all lost never was” (70).³⁰ And yet as a result, the “voice in me not mine” achieves a greater sense of truth; it speaks with a “sideways glance” towards the other “self-styled voice” of the narrator, which produces the final “never was,” putting the premise of absolute belief *sous rature*, admitting, in other words, the feelings of doubt that can plague questions of faith.

As a metaphorical “image” of language, the “voice in me not mine” employs the descriptions of its travels through the world of the mud as a metaphor for the life and the journey of the word. However, while the ingestion and expulsion of “quaqua,” or what the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* calls “wordshit,” creates the double-voiced life of all words, Beckett also seeks to suggest that even “in the beginning” the “Word” – although it appeared to be the uncontaminated monologic “Word” of God (predating, as it must, all other language) – was already divided and in conflict with the laws that govern human

conduct, which it intended to teach. As a result, embodying these words – putting these lessons into practice – reveals their thoroughly dialogic nature. For example, a dialogic conflict occurs between Christ’s solemn plea to “turn the other cheek” and the action of Beckett’s protagonist. To “turn the other cheek” is reconstituted as a pun, as stabbing Pim in the buttocks, each in turn, becomes the protagonist’s preferred method of torturing him. Therefore, the “voice in me not mine,” as it describes its former self in the mud – with “opener” poised – is employed by Beckett to promote a form of behavior antithetical (and therefore dialogic) to the original seriousness of the message of passivity:

then with my right leg thrown crosswise imprison his two one can see the
movement take the opener in my right hand move it down along the spine
and drive it into the arse not the hole not such a fool the cheek a cheek he
cries I withdraw it thump on the skull the cries cease it’s mechanical end
of first lesson second series rest (67)

Here, Christ’s recommended passivity also contains within it a call for violence. The serious message, in other words, is taken literally, which is revealed by the vigor with which the protagonist carries out the above command. As a result, the pun is “intended,” and the scene reflects the dialogic conflict that problematizes the message of passivity through its underlying violence. In fact, not only are the protagonist and Pim brought into conflict, as reported by the “voice in me not mine” and recorded by Krim and Kram; the lofty teaching and language of Christianity are enticed into a dialogic battle within themselves, producing a “dialogic conflict” between passivity and violence that (as it is implied) has been the lesson that humanity has learned from such teachings.

By recognizing the chaos of dialogues embedded in the “voice in me not mine” in *How It Is* as a metaphor for the dialogics of the voice of creation, the allusions to God, creation

and chaos, appear in an altogether new context throughout the narrative. For instance, where God created the world and “saw that it was good,” the voice in *How It Is* repeats the word “good” followed again by “something wrong there.” Here, two voices – one of belief, one of doubt – form a liaison that produces a dialogic conflict as the first voice is crossed out and put *sous rature* by the voice of the other. Further, images of creation spoken in Biblical intonations are dialogically infused and put *sous rature* by the images of destruction: “streaks of dying amber in a murk of ashes the earth must have been on fire when I see us we are already at hand” (32), and that “this old kiln destroyed by fire and in all this tenement” (36). The belief in ordered creation is opposed by such images of destruction, which serve to enforce the chaos produced by the divided “Word” and the dialogical voices in *How It Is*. Indeed, as the protagonist states: “Question if always good old question if always like that since the world for me from the murmurs of my mother shat into the incredible tohu-bohu” (42). The Hebrew word “tohu-bohu,” as Susan Brienza notes, is found in both the Old and New Testaments, and is defined in the OED as “that which is empty and formless,” “chaos,” and “utter confusion.” As a result, throughout *How It Is*, the Christian premise of the unity, balance and order of the “Word” is undermined. Even “God on God,” as the protagonist states, is “desperation” and “utter confusion” (74).

The narrator also makes his presence known in other ways that have a direct impact on the representation of the chaos of the “voice in me not mine,” and the resulting chaotic creation of the macrocosm. For instance, the “voice in me not mine” at one point states, “I’ve lost my latin” (42), which at one level suggests that the presence of any Latin

terminology belongs to another voice distinct and dialogically integrated into its apparent monologic voice. Therefore, the inclusion of the Latin words “ad libitum,” “passim,” “sparsim,” “farrago,” and “idem” in the narrative suggest the dialogic incorporation of the voice of the narrator. At another level, however, Beckett’s choice of Latin terms also strengthens the premise of the great confusion of voices that constitute the “voice in me not mine” and the chaos and of the divided “Word” “in the beginning.” Indeed, each of these Latin terms is defined as an image of the chaos: “passim” means “to spread or scatter in every direction,” “sparsim” is defined as “scattered” “dispersed” and “without order,” “farrago” means “a mixture,” and “idem” is defined as “on the contrary” and “in opposition.” Here, the dialogic chaos from within the “voice in me not mine” is represented as the result of another discourse entering into the narrative discourse, which in turn reflects back on the divided speech act of creation – the “image” of the world and language, in other words, as a “great confusion.”

In *How It Is*, images of time, instead of being mechanisms to mark a “beginning” and all the consecutive “moments” thereafter, are actually represented as without a beginning, and therefore, like the “voice in me not mine” itself, the language of time flows from one moment to the next circling back around again to a beginning that is in fact always only a return – a repetition of the same position – to the same numbers/words that it has already passed innumerable times before. Consequently, the world that the protagonist exists in is “the same kingdom as before a moment before the same it always was I have never left it it is boundless” (43). Time and space, in other words, have no boundaries, “no more time vast figure vast stretch of time,” which nullifies, as a result, a temporal “moment” of

creation. Therefore, the world of *How It Is* remains a timeless present, as the repetitions of the word “days” are dismissed dialogically by the integration of the views of the “self-styled voice” into the fabric of the “voice in me not mine”:

curse God no sound make mental note of the hour and wait midday
midnight curse God or bless him and wait watch in hand but the dark but
the days *that word again what about them* with no memory (40, italics
mine)

In effect, time and creation as mechanisms of order in *How It Is* are no longer applicable: “and the day so near its end at last if it is not compact of a thousand days good old question terrible always for the head and universally apropos” (39). Time is not immune from the dialogic encounters that split the voice into a divided speech act; the presence of the “voice in me not mine” that believes and attempts to instill some order (“good old question”), and the contradicting “self-styled voice” that cannot believe (“terrible”), only further reveal that the language of time is itself dialogically charged, void of its unity and authority as a temporal ordering force.

To consider *How It Is* as a monologue, therefore, is to ignore Beckett’s underlying intentions of illustrating the image of language “breaking up” from within the confines of its own discourse. Interestingly, the divided nature of the “voice in me not mine,” which reveals that its appearance as a unified monologic voice is actually a chaotic series of voices in dialogue has an important impact on the short prose narratives that directly follow *How It Is*. In fact, in “part three” of *How It Is*, Beckett has the “voice in me not mine” speak directly to the images of the *blanc* nothingness that will be produced by the “crosses everywhere indelible traces” (104) of writing *sous rature*:

all that almost blank nothing to get out of it almost nothing to put in that's the saddest that would be the saddest imagination on the decline having attained the bottom what one calls sinking one is tempted (104)

The “blank nothing” alluded to in the passage above is exactly what will be undertaken in earnest by Beckett in his next text *All Strange Away*. The first example from Beckett's “trunk manuscripts,” and the narrative that directly follows *How It Is*, in *All Strange Away* Beckett begins to develop the *blanc* spaces of nothingness identified in *Texts for Nothing* to an even greater extent. In *All Strange Away*, Beckett seeks to represent the failure of language through the “imagination on the decline” as a direct means in which to give presence to the *blanc* spaces of nothingness that are given form each time language attempts, and yet fails, to represent the “timeless” self being in absolute terms.

ENDNOTES

1 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1991), p. 345. All future references are to this edition.

2 *The Unnamable*, p. 351.

3 Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 94. Kenner speaks of the relation between the "narrator" and the "narrated." Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 233. Cohn also makes note of the fact that Beckett referred to the relationship between the "voice in me not mine" and the narrator as "narrator/narrated." All future references are to this edition.

⁴ In a letter to Donald McWhinnie, Beckett offered this invaluable insight into the nature of the voice in *How It Is*: "A 'man' is lying panting in the mud and dark murmuring his 'life' as he hears it obscurely uttered by a voice inside him. This utterance is described throughout the work as the fragmentary recollection of an extraneous voice once heard 'quaqua on all sides.' In the past pages he is obliged to take the onus of it on himself and the lamentable tale of things it tells." Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 345. It should be noted that this description bears a striking resemblance to a similar situation that Beckett would later create in *Company*.

5 Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), p. 146. All further references are to this edition. It is significant to note that this dialogic interaction between the "yesses" as noted by John Pilling, appear to echo Molly Bloom's in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. According to John Pilling, "If Molly Bloom's celebrated 'yes' at the end of *Ulysses* indicates acceptance, this narrator's 'yes' signifies nothing less than an unqualified rejection, and Beckett's distinctness from Joyce is perhaps nowhere more marked than here." John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 45.

6 This is part of what makes the "listener and scribe" figures Krim, and Kram, so unreliable – they have no way of distinguishing where the "bits and scraps" of the "voice in me not mine" ends, and the integrated voice of the narrator begins.

7 While *How It Is* serves as the most complicated example of Beckett's dialogics, this practice "is maintained" in other later short prose texts. See for example, *Texts for Nothing*, *All Strange Away*, *The Lost Ones* and most significantly *Company*.

8 J.E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 89. All future references are to this edition.

9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 195-196. All future references are to this edition.

10 Ibid., p. 196.

11 Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1972), p. 22.

12 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 195.

13 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 95.

14 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 189

15 Ibid., p. 189.

16 Samuel Beckett, *L'Image* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1988), pp. 10-11. I translate this as: "I have such little devices that assist me along even when hugging the walls under the changing skies already I must have been quite shrewd it mustn't be that far a bare yard but it feels far it will go away some day by itself on its four fingers thumb included for one is missing not the thumb and it will leave me I can see it throw its four fingers forward like grapnels the ends sink pull and so it moves away with little horizontal hoists this I do enjoy."

17 The description of how Krim and Kram record the "voice in me not mine" and the "self-styled voice" is given in "part three after Pim" as:

unless recordings on ebonite or suchlike a whole life generations on ebonite one can imagine it nothing to prevent one mix it all up change the natural order play about with that"

unless unchanging after all the voice we're talking of the voice and all my fault lack of attention want of memory the various times mixed up in my head all the various times before during after vast tracts of time

18 This representation of writing *sous rature* is an early indication of the way in which being and the world will be put *sous rature* in the later short prose. In *How It Is*, the fractured syntax creates spaces of white where a voice is speaking but, because the voice is panting for breath, the words do not get spoken and therefore go unrecorded. Throughout the later short prose texts this technique will be developed in a number of different ways. Most often, the language which is recorded is then put *sous rature* or omitted by the language which directly follows. In each case, and beginning here in *How It Is*, the reader is left with an image of *blanc* space of nothing.

19 The dialogics of Shakespeare can be heard everywhere in Beckett's fiction. For a thorough discussion of the various echoes from Shakespeare in *How It Is*, see Susan Brienza's *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*. pp. 88-119.

20 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 197.

21 A good example of the importance of the "hidden dialogicality" in so-called postmodern fiction is undertaken by David Foster Wallace in his text *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999). In particular, Wallace removes the voice that questions the hideous man and the reader learns to infer what the questions were intending to elicit not only through the answer provided, but also by the way in which certain words of the answer can be identified as belonging to the interviewer.

22 As well, the register of the voice, and in particular the intonation of parody, reverses the mocking derisive register back onto itself. The term "intonation" as it is used by Bakhtin, refers to the change in the tone of voice which carries with it part of the message of the speech. Therefore, intonation on its own acts as an indicator for the listener as to what kind of response is being solicited by the speaking voice (and the identify of the self who speaks). The formal language indicated with the repetition of the word "sir" is brought into a dialogical conflict with the low profane voice that is indicated by the word "shit."

23 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 185.

24 It is worth noting that the fragmentary piece *L'Image* deals almost exclusively with this passage in *How It Is*.

25 Indeed, one of the techniques that Beckett undoubtedly inherited from Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) is the integration of theatrical scenes and representation of discourses into the structure of the novel. Other theatrical allusions in *How It Is* include the "little scenes" (85), and "the curtains parted" (57). John Pilling in his study *Samuel Beckett*, makes a number of allusions to Beckett's reading of Sterne (141). However, a serious study has not yet been dedicated to the influences of Rabelais and Sterne on Beckett's writing. One study, Sylvie Henning's *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation, and Tradition* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988) does outline a number of connections to Bakhtin (most specifically in *Murphy* and *The Lost Ones*), but fails to note the underlying importance of Rabelais and Sterne as the underlying sources. Each of these writers are the ultimate foundation for the more carnivalesque aspects of Beckett's writings evident as early as *Dream of Fair to Middling Woman* in terms of narration and *Watt* in terms of textual structure.

26 This connection between *Comment c'est* and "to begin" is, of course, already well documented in, for example, Ruby Cohn's *Back to Beckett*, James Knowlson's and John Pilling's *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1979), p. 62, Enoch Brater's *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 9, and Porter Abbott's "Beginning again: the post-narrative art of *Texts for Nothing* and *How It Is*," in *The*

Cambridge Companion to Beckett ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 106-123.

27 Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1938), p. 56.

28 *How It Is* also increasingly reveals abrupt changes in the lower case to upper-case syntax, the transformations of which appear as hostile moments that appear to scream out from the page. For example, the repetition of the phrase, "DO YOU LOVE ME," (75) "DO YOU LOVE ME CUNT" (96) at different junctures of the narrative indicate a thoroughly dialogic voice posing its question to another, while again revealing the overt hostility that makes the term "love" dialogic. In another example, the double-voicing of love is expressed as the "voice in me not mine" recollects his relationship with his wife Pam Prim: "we made love every day then every third day then the Saturday then just the odd time to get rid of it" (77), which further degenerates to the sordid detail, "she shaved her mound." Throughout *How It Is*, love is not perpetual and everlasting, but subject to the degeneration and the fragmentation that mirrors that of the "voice in me not mine." The ultimate failure of the unified "Word" and "love" subsequently reveals the true nature of divided conflict between two oppositional forces – the image of the eternal and the underlying process of decay which it also contains.

29 Victor Sage, "Innovation and Continuity in *How It Is*" in *Beckett the Shape Changer: A Symposium* ed. Katharine Worth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 94.

30 In this passage, "the blue" is an allusion to the sky which is represented by Beckett in greater detail later in *Company*. In that text, this description which involves another slightly masked autobiographical image is described:

A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand. You turn right and advance in silence southward along the highway. After some hundred paces you head inland and broach the long steep homeward. You make ground in silence hand in hand through the warm still summer air. It is late afternoon and after some hundred paces the sun appears above the crest of the rise. Looking up at the blue sky and then at your mother's face you break the silence asking her if it is not in reality much more distant than it appears... For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. "Company," in *Nohow On* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1996), p. 6

This description, beginning with the "holding your mother by the hand" is particularly interesting. The wording suggests that the child is holding the mother and leading her on this journey towards home. "Homeward" may in fact be an allusion to the home of truth and the journey that the child is leading the mother towards. The question concerning the sky is a direct reference to heaven and the distance between man and God. The mother breaks the handhold of the child, arresting the journey to the truth that the child is leading her towards, similar to the erosion of belief in *How It Is*. Further, in *Waiting for Godot*, there is the link between the child and its ability to communicate with Godot, and the

notion that the child is closest to the truth concerning the nature of God and being in the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Writing of the *Blanc*: *All Strange Away* and Being Beyond Words

The short winter's day was drawing to a close. It seems to me sometimes that these are the only days I have ever known, and especially that most charming moment of all, just before night wipes them out. The addresses he had underlined, or rather marked with a cross, as common people do, proved fruitless one by one, and one by one he crossed them out with a diagonal stroke.¹

Blot, words can be blotted and the mad thoughts they invent, the nostalgia for that slime where the Eternal breathed and his son wrote, long after, with divine idiotic finger, at the feet of the adulteress, wipe it out, all you have to do is say you said nothing, and so say nothing again.²

When Beckett came to write the short prose piece *All Strange Away* (provisionally part of *Faux Départs*) he had misgivings about whether he was up to the task of producing another work of fiction. In the late summer of 1964, he remarked in a letter to Judith Schmidt: "...taking things easy here, but forcing myself to write in the mornings. Scant success so far." By the following October, "Work has not yet broken down again, but only about 4000 words," while two weeks later, "Bitter cold here. Work trembling on edge of ashcan. Author also."³ Beckett's expressed irresolution, stemming from the sheer difficulty of the text, would eventually lead him to abandon *All Strange Away* before finally revising the work and acquiescing to its publication in 1976.⁴ Interestingly, the majority of critical examinations have focussed primarily upon the narrator's difficulties with the production of the text, which has led *All Strange Away* to be cast as a highly ambiguous, agonizingly self-reflexive fictional document that takes as its subject matter the ellipses and epiphanies an author might encounter during the act of writing.⁵ More accurately defined, this form of writing is Beckett's process of writing language and

crossing it out, which Derrida defines as writing *sous rature*: “at each step I was obliged to proceed by ellipses, corrections and corrections of corrections, letting go of each concept at the very moment that I needed to use it.”⁶ And yet, identifying the narrator’s problematical “art and craft” is only a first step into *All Strange Away*. The narrator’s ongoing difficulties with the language (most specifically in the first half of the text), reveal the impossible task of giving adequate expression to the “timeless” self. It is the recognition on Beckett’s part of the futility of attempting to represent the “timeless” in language – dramatized through the context of a dying imagination – that allows him to give form to the “timeless” as nothing each time the language and being are put *sous rature*. For the reader, the objective of *All Strange Away* becomes the investigation of the different ways in which Beckett represents this failure of language to represent, and the effect that the *blanc* spaces of nothingness has on our experience of being in the world.

The failure to capture the “timeless” self in language, and the subsequent *blanc* spaces of nothingness that are produced, immediately introduce the two interrelated ideas that Beckett is seeking to “express” in *All Strange Away*. The first is that language is a system of signs that can never account for the infinite complexities of being, and therefore can never represent being “absolutely” through language – “every word,” as Beckett once stated, “is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.”⁷ However, the inescapable failure that is produced each time language stains the nothingness is, for Beckett, the very objective of representation in *All Strange Away*. Instead of attempting the impossible task of representing being in language by saturating the page in words, and rather than try to obliterate the whiteness of the canvas with the opaque forms that

are characteristic of representational art, Beckett instead chooses to give form to the *blanc* nothingness in order to reveal the presence of the metaphysical indeterminacy of the “timeless” self. Therefore, the failure of language in *All Strange Away* demonstrates not only that there is “nothing to express,” but that this nothingness has a form that has only been represented by proxy – the “absolute” representing the “never was.”⁸ In order to determine what it is about being that resists representation, being must be represented as the presence of an absence – a positive *blanc* nothingness that gives form to the “essential” unknown. This production of the “timeless” as *blanc* spaces of nothingness in *All Strange Away* is precisely what Beckett described as the subject of his art of fiction:

I don’t think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of esthetic axiom that expression is an achievement – must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unquestionable – as something by definition incompatible with art.⁹

What Beckett is calling attention to in this passage is the same “zone” of being that he is examining here in *All Strange Away*. The “impotence” of language that is expressed through writing the narrative *sous rature*, is the expression of the failure of language to signify in any “absolute” way the “timeless” “thing in itself” of being. This failure of language, in turn, produces something that is incompatible with art – the artistic production which seeks to make its failure to represent the most important aspect of the work – the expression, in other words, that there is only the “timeless” itself as something that can only be represented as “nothing,” “to express.”¹⁰ Throughout *All Strange Away*, Beckett continually puts the representations in the text *sous rature* in order to represent the “timeless” self as a *blanc* spaces of nothingness that always escapes signification.

In *All Strange Away*, Beckett's experimentation with representing the "timeless" as "nothing" through the failure of language to signify being is instigated by the narrator's ongoing imaginings of the death of the imagination. Beckett dramatizes the imagination as it is dying and records the effect that imagining the death of the imagination has on the representation of the language and the various forms in the narrative. Indeed, although *All Strange Away* contains a number of the "fundamental" elements that recur throughout the "residua" fiction, it is by first presenting the narrative within the mind or microcosm, and resisting the desire to venture out into the corresponding macrocosm, that indicates the intentional contextual difference from his previous fiction (and most specifically here in terms of *From an Abandoned Work*). This emphasis on the importance of situating the narrative within the mind is nowhere more apparent than in these, the opening words of the text's "prologue":

Imagination dead imagine. A place, *that again*. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, *that again*. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and drag it to a place to die in. Out of the door and down the road in the old hat and coat like after the war, *no, not that again*.¹¹ (italics mine)

Each time the death of the imagination is experienced over the course of the narrative, the language and the images that it represents are crossed out and put *sous rature*. The ongoing drama of this *danse macabre* of the imagination forces the narrative to remain within the confines of the mind, resisting the voice that seeks to take the narrative out into the macrocosm. Therefore, the worlds that Beckett's characters occupied in his previous fiction, and the experiences of the physical body in those worlds, are in these opening lines put *sous rature* by the dialogic second voice resisting and finally putting an end to the repeated attempts to move out into the macrocosm: "no, not that again."

Instead, Beckett situates his narrative within the metaphorical skull of the cube/rotunda, and it is from within this “closed space” that the imagination continuously fails to capture the image of the body, producing as a result the ensuing representation of the “timeless” as the *blanc* nothingness that remains.

Since Beckett is concerned with representing the impossibility of capturing the “timeless” self in any “absolute” terms through language in *All Strange Away*, the ongoing diminishment of the space of the cube/rotunda by the imagination is employed to reveal the impossibility of representing the image of being “absolutely,” no matter the degree to which the representational space is consumed by the representation content of the figure. Here in *All Strange Away*, Beckett begins his representation of spatial geometry as a *blanc* canvas that will he will continue in the later “residua” texts of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ping* and *Lessness*. While the geometrical forms in these later texts are described simply as white, the information in *All Strange Away* is more detailed as “all six planes” of the cube/rotunda are “ivory white,” while the “walls and ceiling are flaking plaster or suchlike” and “the floor like bleached dirt”(173). By representing being within a “closed space” and upon a white ground, Beckett is able to reveal the way in which the figure of being, as soon as it attains representational form, fades into, and becomes an image of, the *blanc* nothingness. Thus, when the narrator attempts to obliterate the underlying whiteness of this frescoed skull and to represent being in “absolute” terms, the image of being disappears:

Tighten it round him, three foot square, five high, no stool, no sitting, no kneeling, no lying, just room to stand and revolve, light as before, faces as before, syntaxes upended in opposite corners. The back of his head touches the ceiling, say a lifetime of standing bowed...leave him for rest

at a and head at g, in dark and light, eyes glaring, murmuring, He's not here, no sound, Fancy is his only hope...nothing clear, place again. (170-1)

As the space of the cube is diminished, so too is Emmo's ability to move, so much so that his body is virtually indistinguishable from the spatial geometry of the cube. However, even having the body cover the entire white ground on which it is placed, the presence of the body conversely becomes an absence that in turn expresses the limits of signification in relation to the "timeless"; "He's not here." Indeed, as the narrator admits on a separate occasion: "The longer he lives and so the further goes the smaller they grow, the reasoning being the fuller he fills the space and so on, and the emptier, same reasoning" (169-70). Emmo is first represented, and then crossed out, as the body becomes indistinguishable from the underlying *blanc* space, blending, like the figure in *Ping*, into the whiteness of the cube. It is at this point, when the body becomes an image of the *blanc* nothingness, that the double intention of the narrator's phrase, "nothing clear" is revealed. On the one hand, the phrase speaks to the cube which has been represented and then crossed out – put *sous rature* – by the dying imagination, while on the other hand, it speaks to the fact that the underlying "nothing" of the *blanc* space that represents the futility of attempting to represent being absolutely, has itself now become "clear." In this passage, everything has been put *sous rature*, as Beckett leaves the reader with an image of a *blanc* nothingness in order to give presence to the absence of the underlying nothingness of the "timeless" self that resists signification and problematizes any attempts to represent its metaphysical complexities in language.

While Beckett represents the impossibility of capturing being as anything other than an image of nothingness (the presence of an absence), he also has Emmo dramatize the futility of attempting to capture the meaning of being through the representational form of language. By having Emmo reenact the process of writing *sous rature*, Beckett is able to represent his own quest to express nothingness in *All Strange Away* through the ongoing death of the imagination (similar to the experience of the vanquished who are “in search of nothing” in *The Lost Ones*). In the following passage, the black writing on the pages is used as a metaphor for the black stain of words, which are first represented and then put *sous rature* as the light of nothingness subsumes the language and returns the page to a *blanc* slate as the writing is erased:

Hell this light from nothing no reason any moment. Sheets of black paper, stick them to the wall with cobweb and spittle, no good, shine like the rest. Imagine what needed, no more any given moment, needed no more, gone, never was. (170)

This passage is reminiscent of another in *Molloy* where speaking of “the laws of the mind” the reader is told that, “you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken the margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is *blank* and flat” (italics mine).¹² Here in *All Strange Away*, Beckett’s approach to the “sheets of black paper” is clearly intended to represent the language written on the page and the intention of the writer to capture the metaphysical “timeless” being through the production of language. In this instance, Emmo dramatizes the failure of language to represent the self of being, which in turn gives a positive presence to the *blanc* space of the underlying nothingness that this process of putting the language *sous rature* produces. No matter how inscribed the page becomes with writing, the light of nothingness – “this light from nothing” –

shines through and obliterates the blackness, until the page is once again returned to a *tabula rasa*. Therefore, the final image of the *blanc* page is that of the written word put *sous rature*, symbolizing not only the impossibility of representing being through language, but also the underlying nothingness, similar to that in *Lessness*, which serves as a metaphor for the unknown “timeless.” Language “never was,” nor ever will be able to capture the essence of the “timeless” self; the closest that one can come to representing the “timeless” is by putting writing *sous rature*, by attempting to represent as fully as possible the *blanc* space of nothingness that always escapes representation.

Representing nothingness is itself the “residua” that remains after language has failed. Therefore, being exists as something that is beyond the limits of language and cannot possibly be imbued with “absolute” meaning(s) – there is, as the narrator repeatedly remarks, “no true image.” As such, being can be represented, but only as something that takes into account what remains outside of representation (the “timeless”), which for Beckett is accomplished by crossing out the written sign. Therefore, as Beckett makes clear in the representation of Emmo and Emma in *All Strange Away*, language becomes a more powerful means of representation when it fails. Each time language fails it is put *sous rature*, paradoxically giving representation to what it fails to represent – giving form to the “essential” as the something of nothing that exists beyond the limits of representation. In part, the source of this unknown nothingness is the fact that the origin of being remains a “mystery.”¹³ The most that can be said about the beginning of being is that there was a beginning. That the beginning remains a mystery, is a problem that Beckett already expressed in *Texts for Nothing* and considers in still more detail later in

Lessness; here in *All Strange Away*, Beckett represents a brief historical account of the futility of attempting to come to terms with the experience of being, which has revealed more about what is not known, than what is known – a story that has been written about a metaphysical problem that has remained “beyond words”:

Imagine other murmurs, Mother mother, mother in heaven, Mother of God, God in heaven, combinations with Christ and Jesus, other proper names in great numbers say of loved ones for the most part and cherished haunts, imagine as needed, unsupported interjections, ancient Greek philosophers ejaculated with place of origin when possible suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period, completed propositions such as, She is not here (175)

Beckett represents an historical perspective imagining “other murmurs” concerning the representation of being that have always been expressed, and then put *sous rature*. “[C]ompleted propositions” have been articulated, and then crossed out, inadvertently expressing, instead of explaining, the *blanc* nothingness of ineffable being. The entire history of Western thought concerned with the metaphysical question of being has – albeit unintentionally – been expressing the same *blanc* spaces, gaps and “intervals” (as they are called in *Texts for Nothing*) in the knowledge of being. The “pursuit of knowledge” and the “completed proposition” concerning being, are represented as the presence of an absence – a *blanc* space – a “timeless” nothing that is something. Even proper names which are used for identity do not identify and inscribe meaning onto the underlying identity of being – the signifier, in other words, fails to represent in “absolute” terms the underlying meaning of the signified.¹⁴ Therefore, while “ancient Greek philosophers ejaculated with place of origin” the place of origin remains a *blanc* space – “[s]he is not here.”¹⁵

The representation of being through language therefore paradoxically reveals the impossibility of ever accounting for the “timeless” self in language; language, in the quest to signify the “timeless,” “thing in itself” of being, is non-relational. Therefore, when the narrator of *All Strange Away* identifies Emmo and Emma as images of words, the language intentionally fails to signify being in any “absolute” way. For example, Emmo and Emma are, “tattered syntaxes of Jolly and Draeger Praeger Draeger” (169), and to further contribute to the failure of language to signify they are, “syntaxes upended in opposite corners” (171). Beckett is identifying the fact that the only definition that one can associate to these terms and their relation to being, is one of non-relation due to their failure to signify. They are, therefore, in relation to expressing the “timeless,” intended to mean *nothing*. Further, given the fact that language cannot possibly represent the “timeless” self (nor, for that matter, the “timeless” world), language must instead be written and then put *sous rature*: “Jolly and Draeger gone, never were” (173). While the phrase “never were” may appear to imply an “absolute” absence, Beckett is actually stressing the fact that whether taken together or alone, the language which seeks to represent the “timeless” is always, within the very act of expressing, signifying a *blanc* space through the movement (“gone”) of *sous rature*. It is through this relation of non-relation between the metaphysical experience of being as ultimately “timeless,” and the words that are used to express it, that the failure to signify not only underscores the inadequacy of language as a representational tool – the “no means to express” – but conversely, through its failure, imbues and gives a form to the “timeless” as the something of nothing – the a-temporal and a-spatial “thing in itself” – that is the underlying mystery of the experience of being.

It is not only language that is reduced to nothingness in *All Strange Away* when it is used to stand in the place of being. Beckett also undermines the representational forms of Emmo and Emma as they exist within the fiction (and therefore to a certain extent within the language) itself. In other words, Beckett does not represent them as living, sentient beings, but in order to stress their artificial nature, they, like all the characters in *Murphy* (with the exception of Murphy), bear a more natural affiliation to puppets. For example, “this body hinged and crooked as only the human man or woman living or not” (178). And yet, instead of being manipulated by strings, these puppets are manipulated by language, as it is written and then put *sous rature*. In this passage, the representation of Emmo is at the mercy of the language that is continuously written, only to be crossed out:

take off his coat, no, naked, all right, leave that for the moment...Light flows, eyes close, stay closed till it ebbs, no can't do that, eyes stay open, all right, look at that later. Black bag over his head, no good, all the rest in the light, front sides, back, between the legs.(170)

Emmo is a being who is ruled by a language that fails to signify, trace a linear path, or guide the action in the search for meaning. Being/Emmo/puppet consequently becomes a slave to language, a puppet being controlled by language which is unable to represent the “essential” a-temporal and a-spatial being in any “absolute” terms. Further, the puppet, by symbolizing a living sentient being, suggests a complex relationship between subject and object – between the “real” and “ideal”; the metaphysical implication of the puppet is that the reader suspends his/her disbelief and invest the puppet with human qualities, which reveals that the living being itself is a mere puppet on a string.¹⁶ “Being has a form,” Beckett once stated to Lawrence Harvey, “Someone will find it someday. Perhaps

I won't, but someone will. It is a form that has been abandoned, left behind, a proxy in its place."¹⁷ Being, in other words, is always being represented by something that stands in its place, and yet fails to account for and lead being towards, what it means to be in the world.

Therefore, throughout *All Strange Away* Beckett is clearly indicating that being only achieves its true representational form as both the something that can be captured in language (surface and line), and the "timeless" nothing of the *blanc* space that exists within being and yet outside the limits of language – in the fringes "beyond words" (172). One technique which accomplishes this relationship between the presence and the absence of the body is the fact that any detailing of the body of Emma is represented in "scattered" fragments throughout the narrative. At various points the narrator alludes to the images – many of which are reminiscent of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Words and Music* (1962) – of Emma's "long black hair strewn when light" (173), her "long black lashes when light" (174), and "though no real image puckered tip of left breast, leave right a mere name" (174). And yet, never is the description of these elements of the body brought together to provide a unified image. At other points, the reader is told that she is a "small woman" (177), a "slim woman" (172), "most womanly," (173), and most importantly, that Emma herself is "lovely beyond words" (171). Indeed, the body, as a unified whole, is literally "beyond words," as it is represented as a form that has been put *sous rature* – the presence of an absence – an image that even if pieced together would never produce a unified and complete representation.

Since language can only “express” but cannot explain the metaphysical experience of being, Beckett also represents the body of Emma as an image that is written *sous rature*. The narrator states: “hands on knees, to hold herself together. Till halt and up, no, no image, down, for her down, to sit or kneel, kneel, arse on heels, hands on thighs trunk bowed, breasts hanging, crown on ground, eyes glaring, no, no image, eyes closed...Hands, imagine hands. Imagine hands...Left on ball of right shoulder holding enough not to slip, right lightly clenched on ground”(173). While this passage, with its cinematography-like, “Till halt and up, no, no image, down” will be employed later by Beckett as a means of describing the rotunda in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the position of Emma’s body is similar to that of the vanquished in *The Lost Ones*. Beckett organizes the body in this passage to represent abandonment, and the mystical attainment of “nothing.” As a physical form, Emma can be said to be present, but is at the same time, in her representation of abandonment, is also mentally absent from the material world. Therefore, from within the “timeless” world of the rotunda, Emma in this mystical pose of abandonment is represented by Beckett as “a *pure*, will-less...timeless *subject*.”¹⁸ The image of Emma is one of a representation that has been put *sous rature* – the image of the presence of the body, and the mystical absence of the mind, that combine together into the presence of an absence, and the image of Emma as something that is equally nothing.

Through the use of light and dark in the cube/rotunda, Beckett constructs the image of being as an *in-completed* proposition – one that is partly present through the framing of the body in the light, while partly obscured and absent within the darkness. The fact that the representation of the body in *All Strange Away* is the presence of an absence, and

therefore includes within it the “timeless” nothing, also suggests a number of important connections between Beckett’s “residua” fiction and the representation of the body in selected works from Beckett’s drama written during the 1960s.¹⁹ Indeed, at approximately the same time that Beckett was writing *All Strange Away*, his work in the theatre had begun to focus less on the relationship between mobility and immobility, and more upon the relationship of light and dark and the dramatic possibilities that these binary oppositions offered in terms of representing the material body. In *Not I* (1973), for example, the entire stage is cast in darkness while only the face of Mouth remains in the light. In *Play* (1964), the stage is once again cast in darkness, with three bodies placed in urns and forced into speech each time the spotlight – functioning, as Shimon Levy notes, like another character – illuminates each face.²⁰ The importance of the relationship between the light and the dark in the later short prose is inherited from this same dramatic device, and contributed to the majority of these “androgynous” texts – including *All Strange Away* – being later developed into theatre. While this technique of framing the body in the light and dark certainly has Lacanian overtones – in that it speaks to the representation of the body in pieces prior to the “mirror stage” and the depersonalization which occurs if the body remains dis-unified – for Beckett, the image of the fragmented body that is produced through the contrast between light and dark is the means to reveal the “timeless” self of being as a form that is ultimately unknowable. Considered in terms of *All Strange Away*, the intensity with which the relationship of light and dark is used, along with the closed space of the cube/rotunda, suggest that Beckett had the theatre in mind when he was writing the narrative, and moreover, the potential ways in which the

light and dark could be used to represent an image of the body that is not “absolute,” but fragmentary.

As such, in *All Strange Away* Beckett employs the light and dark in the cube/rotunda to represent the body of Emma, in pieces. However, the concern here is not, as claimed by past critics, to represent a “pornographic” image of Emma.²¹ Instead, placing the sensual and reproductive images of Emma’s body in the light emphasizes being as occupying the liminal ground of nothingness – existing in the purgatorial world that conflates the binary oppositions of presence and absence, being and the “timeless” as nothing. While the reproductive body parts of Emma that are represented in the light and framed by the darkness speak to the beginning of life, Beckett is also suggesting that it is as a result of giving life that they are inextricably united with death. Placing these parts of the body in the light, therefore, foregrounds the presence and the absence of being – that the only metaphysical certainty of being is the nothingness that being is always moving towards by virtue of being born. As a result, in the following passage, all the images that Beckett represents in the light lead to nothingness:

He’s not here, no sound, Fancy dead, gaping eyes unaffected. See how light stops at five soft and mild for bodies, eight no more, one per wall, four in all, say all of Emma. First face alone, lovely beyond words, leave it at that, then deasil breasts alone, then thighs and cunt alone, then arse and hole alone, all lovely beyond words. See how he crouches down and back to see, back of head against face when eyes on cunt, against breasts, when on hole, and vice versa, all most clear.(171)

In this passage, Emma is first put *sous rature*, which is then followed by the body of Emma represented through the contrast of light and dark – the image of the body as something *and* nothing. Here, the body in pieces is achieved by putting the body *sous*

ature. The light, which “stops at five soft and mild” is used to represent the body against a backdrop of darkness by illuminating a body in parts and diminishing the unity of the material body. Therefore, the light which is used to define the body in pieces against a background of darkness, first produces the disintegration of the body by defining “eight” “bodies” on the wall, “all of” which are Emma, and second, the light isolates individual parts of the body; a “face alone,” “breasts alone,” “thighs and cunt alone,” “arse and hole alone” each time stressing pieces as “alone” and therefore detached from the body each time that the “light stops.”²²

Throughout *All Strange Away*, Beckett employs the terms “imagination” and “fancy” that find an echo in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.²³ Coleridge states, “Fancy is always an ape, and too often the adulterator and counterfeiter of our memory.”²⁴ Alluding to “Fancy” as an “adulterator” and “counterfeiter,” is another means for Coleridge to speak to the means by which Fancy manipulates the material of the past that is preserved in memories (most specifically the production of “voluntary memory” of which Beckett speaks in *Proust*). Fancy, in other words, also means “fantasy,” and the act of “fantasizing,” which is exactly what happens when the narrator imagines the scene of sexual union between Emmo and Emma. The narrator first states, “Imagine him kissing, caressing, licking, sucking, fucking and bugging all this stuff, no sound” (171), and then goes on to develop this later in more detail in this passage written *sous rature*:

Imagination dead imagine to lodge a second in that glare a dying common house or dying window fly, then fall the five feet to the dust and die or die and fall. No, no image, no fly here, no life or dying here, but his, a speck of dirt. Or hers since sex not seen so far, say Emma standing, turning,

sitting, kneeling, lying, in dark and light, saying to herself, She's not here, no sound, Fancy is her only hope, and Emmo on the walls, first the face, handsome beyond words, then deasil details later. And how crouching down and back she turns murmuring, Fancy her being all kissed, licked, fucked and so on by all that, no sound, hands on knees to hold herself together. (172)

And yet, this is all a fabrication – an act of the will to fantasize masquerading as memory. Further, copulation is both death and the procreative act, absence and presence combined as the narrator notes later: “quite expressionless, ohs and ahs copulate cold” (175). The death of Emmo as he is situated on the walls of memory, in other words, allows for the realization of the birth of Emma and fantasy. However, what has gone unnoticed is that Emmo and Emma represent two halves of the same individual, and therefore a dialectical relationship between death and birth. What we should observe about this (and every) dialectical relationship is that it is paradoxically “separate” and, at the same time, “whole.” On the one hand, “binary” suggests a separateness between disparate, dissimilar entities. On the other hand, insofar as “binary” depends on the relationship of these dissimilar entities, it signifies a singular, inclusive entity which contains two paradoxical opposites. In this case, Fancy, as represented in the body of Emma, is not some external force which kills Emmo from the outside; rather, she represents the forces inherent in language and within being itself which cause it to undermine and put *sous rature* its own terms (or representational form) from inside its own discourse.

By representing the fact that the “timeless” self forces being to exist as something that is also nothing, Beckett is able to represent the metaphysical plight of being as the ill-fated journey to seek a form of representation that accommodates the idea of being and gives

being an “absolute” presence, thereby putting the uncertainties and the *blanc* “timeless” nothing itself, *sous rature*. Therefore, the only means to distinguish being from the nothingness is to find a means of representation that can determine the meaning of the *blanc* nothingness that resists signification – the discovery which will subsequently complete the form of being. However, language, as it stands in relation to being, is an inadequate tool for such a project. In this passage, Beckett represents Emmo attempting to “shroud” himself in the blackness of language in order to obscure the underlying nothingness and imbue his form with “absolute” meaning:

Black shroud, start search for pins. Light on, down on knees, sights pin, makes for it, light out, gets pin in dark, light on, sights another, light out, so on, years of time on earth. Back on the stool in the shroud saying, That’s better, now he’s better, and so sits and never stirs, clutching it to him where it gapes, till it all perishes and rots off of him and hangs off of him in black flitters.(170)

Through the changing conditions of light and dark, the perpetual cycle of life and death forces the “search for pins” to go on for “years of time on earth” before Emmo is once again brought back to the immobility of his “stool.” In an attempt to protect himself from being consumed in the *blanc* nothingness of the dying imagination, Emmo clothes himself in language to obscure the *blanc* nothingness of his “bonewhite” skin. However, in the end, the language “gapes” and falls away in “black flitters” allowing the *blanc* nothing to shine through.²⁵ Therefore, the suffering of the body, which is caused by it being unknown even to itself, is in no way diminished by the accumulation of experiences (the pins) that are gathered and employed to hold the self together (or bring together the dilemma of being) over “years of time on earth.” All systems of knowledge lead nowhere except back to the place of the “absolute absence of Absolute” knowledge

of anything – back, that is, to the experience of the “timeless” which Beckett represents as nothing.²⁶

While the representation of light and dark is employed to represent the play between writing and the *blanc* page, and the body that is both something and nothing, Beckett also employs these binary oppositions to further develop the metaphysical plight of being. On the one hand, the representation of light and dark in the cube/rotunda can be seen to represent the fluctuations of creative inspiration that Shelley speaks of as “transitory brightness” in “Defence of Poetry,” and on the other hand, the passage of time and passing generations – the brief moment or insignificant instant that is each life as it shifts silently between the darkness and light, and the futile tasks that lead quite literally nowhere.²⁷ In the end, the labour to accomplish the meaning of being, is put *sous rature*:

Light out, long dark, candle and matches, imagine them, strike one to light, light on, blow out, light out, strike another, light on, so on. Light out, strike one to light, light on, light all the same, candlelight in light, blow out, light out, so on. No candle, no matches, no need, never were...no paper, no pins, no candle, no matches, never were, talking to himself no sound in the last person...Falling on his knees in the dark to murmur, no sound.(170)

Beckett once stated to Tom Driver, “If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable.”²⁸ At one level, the play of light and dark perpetuates the absurdity of Emmo’s actions,²⁹ while also signifying the perpetual chain of being engaged in the search for metaphysical answers to the “essential” self.³⁰ At another level, Emmo embodies the futility of the artist’s endeavors to represent being; the artist is prone to the same fluctuations of inspiration that contribute to the problematical relation between the

subject and the object of representation. Finally, the accumulation of knowledge concerning the metaphysical experience of the “timeless” being that has been gained and passed on, amount, in the end, to nothing, as the entire production is put *sous rature*: “no candle, no matches, no pins.”

As Porter Abbott has noted, the death of the imagination severs the narrative into two acts and it is Emma – as the embodiment of “fancy” and the “only hope” – who is finally the lone figure within the rotunda. One of the most significant details concerning Emma is the narrator’s allusions to an “undefined object” that she holds in her hand. Following some deferral as to the nature of this object – “something in this hand, imagine later” – an explanation is finally offered, “say like red no grey say something grey...rubber ball or small grey ordinary rubber bulb”(178) reminiscent of the “old muckball” in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, and the round object belonging to Dan Rooney in *All That Fall*. However, it is in this, the final description of Emma and this “grey ball” that she holds, that Beckett puts the entire production of *All Strange Away* *sous rature*, while at the same time identifying the significance of the metaphysical importance of the experience of the “timeless” nothingness that he will seek to represent in the remainder of the “residua” fiction:

...henceforth here no other sounds than these say gone now never were sprayer rubber bulb or punctured ball *and nothing ever in that hand* lightly closed *on nothing* any length till for no reason yet imagined fingers tighten then relax no sound and to the same end slip of left hand down the slope of right upper arm no sound and same purpose none of breath to the end that here henceforth no other sounds than these and never were that is than faint sop to mind faint sighing sound for tremor of sorrow at faint memory of a lying side by side and fancy murmured dead. (181 italics mine)

Speaking of this passage, John Pilling explains that “Beckett tries out, for perhaps the first time in his work, the ‘erasure’ technique.”³¹ While it is clear that the entire narrative is concerned with *sous rature*, Pilling draws attention to the most all-encompassing act of crossing-out, as “henceforth here no other sounds than these say gone now and *never were*” (italics mine) eliminates the text in one swift stroke. However, what has gone unrecognized is that the image of the “grey ball” in this final scene suggests Emma holding the rotunda in her hand. Further, as a metaphor for the metaphysical experience of being in the “timeless” world, the rotunda is the presence of an absence, an unexplainable nothing: “nothing ever in the hand” and that her hand is “closed on nothing.” The image that Beckett leaves the reader with is, in other words, an image of the rotunda as a metaphor for the “timeless” nothingness of the macrocosm.

Therefore, in *All Strange Away*, each time the imagination passes from life into death, the writing is forced to undergo a process of being unwritten – put *sous rature* – while the images, because they are constructed in and by language, are also simultaneously erased. As a result, each time the imagination dies and the language is put *sous rature*, the image of being becomes the presence of an absence, an image that is something but that can only represent the “timeless” – that part of being that is a-temporal and a-spatial – as nothing. Throughout *All Strange Away*, the dying imagination and the erratic representation of the figures in the language dramatize this inability of language to capture the “essential” “thing in itself” that is being in any terms. It is this very failure that Beckett seeks to represent, and which gives form to the nothingness and the metaphysical plight of being. In *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the fictional “residua” of *All*

Strange Away, the rotunda is a perfect forum in which to “accommodate” the problematical representation of the “timeless” world. There, Beckett furthers his examination of the “timeless” self in relation to the inability of language to represent the a-spatial and a-temporal “thing in itself” of the external world each time the rotunda is put *sous rature*. By representing the “timeless” as nothing, the world of the rotunda becomes something that is also nothing, allowing the reader to see into the form and the underlying chaos of its content.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Samuel Beckett, *The Expelled*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 57.
- 2 Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 124.
- 3 Samuel Beckett, Letters written to Judith Schmidt, 17 August, 23 October, and 6 November 1964. Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 406.
- 4 *All Strange Away* was first published in 1976 by Gotham Book Mart. See the chronology in this study for more details.
- 5 Enoch Brater, *The Drama in the Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 79. Brater states that “*All Strange Away* elevates the process of continual reconsideration into high art, revealing countless refinements that go into any literary making.” For Brater, “the drama in the text” of *All Strange Away* is one that is produced most explicitly by sound – “the intonation of the voice” – suggesting that this language seeks the material world of spoken presence. I would add to this that the voice in *All Strange Away* is in fact built upon the same dialogic relationships that Beckett created in *How It Is*. In the opening of *All Strange Away*, the voice splits in two: (1) a written prose voice seeking to keep the text as a work of fiction, and (2) the spoken voice within it which makes its presence known through asides and provides resistance to the written narrative voice. Thus, this second voice of resistance is read in the “intonation” of a spoken voice, which clashes with the written voice from within the same shared discourse. Therefore, the ongoing transformations from the written voice into the spoken voice is a representation – in miniature – of the way in which the written word is transformed into the spoken word of theatre – from text to performance. Throughout *All Strange Away*, this relationship induces another and a different level to the drama in the text.
- 6 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 14.
- 7 Quoted in Brian Finney, *Since How It Is: a Study of Beckett's later Fiction* (London: Covent Garden Press, Ltd., 1972), p. 37. The allusion to silence and nothingness is for Beckett the only means of identifying the presence of the absence of the “timeless” self. For example in *The Unnamable*, the intention is to rid the self of all the other voices that construct being in the language of others. Only by putting these voices *sous rature* is it possible to find the silence where the “timeless” self is located. In these later prose texts in this study, it is the metaphor of the *blanc* space of nothingness that Beckett situates as the “timeless.” Since language cannot represent that which is a-temporal and a-spatial – the “thing in itself” – the use of language simply stains the nothingness, but in no way provide any signification concerning its meaning.

8 Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 139. All future references are to this edition.

9 Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," quoted in J.E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 6.

10 Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, p. 139.

11 Samuel Beckett, *All Strange Away*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), pp. 169-181. All future references are to this edition.

12 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/ Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1991), p. 13. All future references are to this edition.

13 The importance of the term "mystery" will be discussed at greater length in the chapter on *The Lost Ones*. In particular, the term mystery is concerned with the eyes of the vanquished as representing the mystical "timeless" experience of "nothing."

14 Indeed, the fact that none of Beckett's characters is actually able to speak in these later short prose texts begins here in *All Strange Away*. In this text, the voices of Emmo and Emma have been put *sous rature*: "He says" "no sound." The voice, in such instances, is represented as being unable to represent or account for the experience, and subjectivity, of the "timeless" "I." Therefore, reducing the voice to silence contributes once again to the drama in the text, in that to speak on stage is always to be tied to the experience of speech and silence – speaking the words of the author while the voice of the "timeless" self is silenced.

15 In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault states: "If those arrangements [which define man] were to disappear as they appeared, if some event... were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." Those arrangements, as Beckett represents them, have in fact never existed. Quoted in Richard Began, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 149.

16 Indeed, the importance of the writing *sous rature* is made clear through the way in which the body is unable to will its own movements. When the process of writing *sous rature* is absent in other words, the body is incapable of actually moving of its own accord. The failure to act on its own, and through its own volition, stresses the metaphysical plight of being. As such, the futile attempts to escape from the suffering of the world are represented in the "tragicomedy" of Emma's futile attempts to escape from the metaphysical cycle of birth and death in the cube:

Clear further how at some earlier more callow stage this writhe again and again in vain through weakness or natural awkwardness or want of pliancy or want of resolution and how halfway through on back with legs just clear how after some time in the balance thus falls back to where she lay.
(180)

This is Beckett's vision of the metaphysical plight of being – the failure to achieve knowledge of the “timeless” self, the futility of being on earth (which Beckett often correlates to being on stage), and life infused with suffering. If the assumption that God exists is true, Beckett implies, then what we are facing is a malevolent instead of a benevolent creator. As such, this scene is representative, like *Godot*, of the tragicomedy of being: there is no end to the “torments” of the body. The narrator, who can be read as an analogy to a malevolent God, simply records Emma's distress and does nothing to alleviate her suffering. The comedy of the situation is that, although cognizant of the futility of the exercise, she continues to try; the tragedy is that it makes no difference.

17 Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 249.

18 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J.Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), Book I, p. 231.

19 Which goes some way to explaining the inclusion of the word “Diagram” in the narrative of *All Strange Away*. As the staging of Beckett's theatre became more complex, Beckett turned to using diagrams to establish how the dramatic tableau should be produced. For example, in *Footfalls* (1975), *Ghost Trio* (1975), *...but the clouds...* (1976), *Quad* (1982), and in *What Where* (1983) diagrams are used to establish the relationship of the body to the stage. As such, the inclusion of the word “Diagram” lends credence to the premise that *All Strange Away* is a working out of a theatre project.

20 Shimon Levy, *Samuel Beckett's Self Referential Drama: The Three I's* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 37.

21 Graham Fraser, “*All Strange Away*: The Pornographic Imagination,” *Modern Fiction Studies* (Fall-Winter 1995), p. 515-30.

22 This scene in *All Strange Away* finds a direct echo in *Endgame* when Hamm asks Clov: “The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene? Naked bodies?” in Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 12.

23 This connection between Coleridge and Beckett in *All Strange Away* is also alluded to by Peter Murphy in, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 89.

24 The views on the relationship between the Imagination and Fancy held by Coleridge are in fact subsequent to those described by William Wordsworth. According to Wordsworth, “Fancy, as she is an active, is also, under her own laws and in her own

spirit, a creative faculty. In what manner Fancy ambitiously aims at a rivalry with Imagination, and Imagination stoops work with the materials of Fancy, might be illustrated from the compositions of all eloquent writers, whether in prose or in verse.” Similar to Coleridge, for Wordsworth, the Imagination is regarded as the more important and powerful faculty.

25 In *The Unnamable* a similar allusion to a pin is described: “what else can there be but signs of life, the fall of a pin, the stirring of a leaf, or the little cry that the frogs give when the scythe slices them in half, or when they are spiked in their pools, with a spear, one could multiply the examples” p. 372.

26 Samuel Beckett, “Dante...Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,” in *Disjecta*, p. 33.

27 Percy Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1109. This idea of the flux of the creative faculty in the artist is discussed in greater detail in the chapter on *Ping* located in this study.

28 Tom Driver, “Beckett by the Madeleine” *Columbia University Forum*, iv, (Summer 1961).

29 So much so, that not only does Beckett use light and dark in order to produce dramatic tableaux, he also dresses his characters in mixtures of black and white which, devoid of any other colour, gives the reader/audience the impression of reading/watching a theatre production that is recorded from some distant time in black in white.

30 As James Knowlson points out in his *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett*, the use of light and dark in Beckett’s theatre (and even earlier in his fiction) has no absolute correlation to one specific metaphor.

31 James Knowlson and John Pilling. *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1979), p. 143.

CHAPTER FIVE

The “Little Storms” of Convection and Turbulence in the Rotunda of

Imagination Dead Imagine

I found myself in a kind of vast yard or campus, surrounded by high walls, its surface an amalgam of dirt and ashes, and this seemed sweet to me after the vast and heaving wastes I had traversed, if my information was correct. I almost felt out of danger! At the centre of this enclosure stood a small rotunda, windowless, but well furnished with loopholes.¹

the voice quaqu on all sides then within in the little vault empty closed eight planes bone-white if there were a light a tiny flame all would be white ten words fifteen words like a fume of sighs when the panting stops then the storm the breath token of life part three and last it must be nearly ended²

In 1964, following months of writing and revision, Beckett decided to abandon the text *All Strange Away*, choosing instead to distill its material into a shorter French “novel,” *Imagination morte imaginez* (1965).³ While in the past, writing in French had provided Beckett with the “right weakening effect,”⁴ *Imagination morte imaginez* and its subsequent translation into the English *Imagination Dead Imagine*, proved resistant: “I have finished with the rotunda. To be rid of it. 1000 words. Six months of erasures.”⁵ Ironically, what makes this little “novel” so complex is the fact that Beckett is very much concerned with putting everything he creates under erasure.⁶ In fact, the very act of writing *sous rature* – carried over from the final images in *All Strange Away* – is absolutely critical to confronting the underlying complexities of the text.⁷ In *Imagination Dead Imagine* Beckett is not interested in simply creating a stable geometrical form in which to accommodate his story; his intention is to make the microcosmic rotunda an image of nothingness by representing its form and then actively putting that form *sous rature*. By doing so, Beckett makes it possible for the reader to comprehend the

underlying chaos of the microcosm and to put into question, and eventually *sous rature*, the premise of a Christian God who serves as a stable centre for the macrocosm.

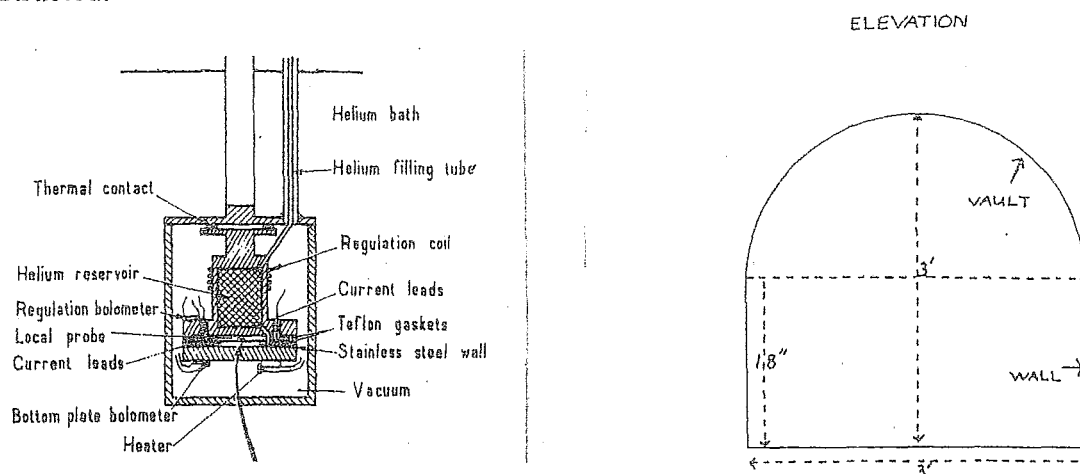
At the conclusion of the *Three Dialogues* (1949) with George Duthuit, Beckett expressed the need to make the “fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new form of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation.”⁸ The “relation” that Beckett is speaking of is the one that exists between the subject and the object, while the actual failure is produced by the impossibility of ever representing what Schopenhauer refers to as the “timeless” self and world.⁹ However, throughout the “residua,” this “occasion” that is produced by the “fidelity to failure” is Beckett’s greatest achievement; the representation of the impossibility to represent the object in “absolute” terms (through perception and by extension language) is expressed through writing *sous rature* which gives form to the “timeless” self and world as a *blanc* nothingness that exists beyond the limits of signification. Nowhere is this “fidelity to failure” and the production of the “timeless” as a *blanc* nothing more apparent than in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, as Beckett seeks to represent the “timeless” rotunda in terms similar to what he described as the relation between representing form and content in his interview with Tom Driver (1961):

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.

By employing the image of the rotunda as a metaphor for the external world, and by placing it in the imagination, Beckett is able to bridge what Schopenhauer called the “gulf between the ideal and the real” in order to produce the “hieroglyphics” of the a-spatial and a-temporal “timeless” nothing within its form. The “ideal” is first produced by representing the form of the rotunda as something that appears to have an “absolute” presence, while the “real” or reality of the object, is produced with the failure of this “ideal” through the subsequent act of representing the rotunda *sous rature*. By representing the rotunda *sous rature*, Beckett represents its form in a process of continuous flux – as both something and nothing, present and absent, and yet never one nor the other in “absolute” terms. The effect is that the *blanc* “invisibility” of the “timeless” rotunda “becomes a thing,” while also paradoxically stressing that the object, or “thing in itself,” can never be captured through perception or language. It is by constructing the rotunda through this ongoing process of *sous rature* which produces the *blanc* a-spatial nothingness, and allows the reader to be privy to the “big buzzing blooming confusion” of its underlying sense data that actually appears to be based upon specific basic properties that correspond to those found in recent studies in modern physics.

When considered in relation to recent studies undertaken in modern physics, the pattern of light, grey and dark in *Imagination Dead Imagine* correlates to basic patterns between the fluid flow of convection and the onset of the chaos of turbulence (for Beckett, an analogue to the “big buzzing blooming confusion”).¹⁰ The meticulous attention and documentation reserved for these events in the rotunda find a parallel in the study

undertaken some twelve years later by German scientist Albert Libchaber.¹¹ In an effort to document the means by which the fluid flow of convection in the natural world produces turbulence, Libchaber constructed a tiny container to measure the fluid motion “from smooth flow to turbulence” which he called “Helium-in-a-Small-Box.”¹² As Shimon Levy has noted, the construction of the rotunda and the “Helium-in-a-Small-Box,” suggests that Beckett and Libchaber share a similar concern with establishing a microcosmic space. What has gone unrecognized is that Beckett’s treatment of the form also allows the “closed flow” within the rotunda to gradually reveal the forces of the “little storms” that turn convection turbulent.¹³ Considered diagrammatically, it is possible to see how the closed space of the “Helium-in-a-Small-Box” and the rotunda are constructed:¹⁴



Constructing a space that will mirror the conditions of the outside world immediately introduces the problem of how to observe the system without the interference which would necessarily occur with the introduction of an intrusive “eye of prey” attempting to capture, by observation, the meaning of the chaos.¹⁵ For Libchaber, the answer was relatively simple; a tiny eyepiece allowed observation through from the top of his

“Helium-in-a-Small-Box.” For Beckett, the necessity to create a means of perception into the spatial geometry of the rotunda without disturbing the topography of its surface, and to create the image of a closed space that reflects the entire cosmos, is considerably more complex.

Imagination Dead Imagine begins with Beckett reducing all life to figure and ground. This process, which traces a path from complexity to apparent simplicity, makes possible not only the perception of the presence of the rotunda’s chaotic content, but also the documentation of how, and as far as possible when, the chaos it contains is produced. However, while Beckett’s parallel between the rotunda and the world is an intentional oversimplification, the means by which he actually overcomes the problems of allowing the production of chaos within its form to be perceived is one of great complexity achieved only by writing the rotunda’s structure *sous rature*. Beginning with what John Pilling refers to as the narrative’s “prologue,” Beckett – as he does throughout *How It Is* – constructs the “little fabric” of his narrator’s speech as a dialogic discourse.¹⁶ What ensues is a thinly veiled unmaking of the biblical story of creation, in which the dialogic structure serves to submerge the reader in the paradoxical processes of writing and erasure, by creating a form that is present and absent, before these two binary oppositions are finally allowed to converge and produce the image of the rotunda as the representation of the “timeless.”¹⁷

In the beginning, the narrator says, “No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands,

waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda” (182).¹⁸ James Hansford has argued that the choice of the word “vanished” instead of “vanish” in the above passage is due to the fact that the world was never “fully present,” and that the first negation of “imagination dead” is itself negated by the final “omission of the whole,” which thereby excludes “altogether the movement of erasure.”¹⁹ However, Beckett clearly states that the “imagination [is] not dead yet,” only to have the voice of a mysterious “you” contradict the first voice with “imagination dead.” Further, the second sentence is designed to solidify this transference from active imagining into “imagination dead” through difference in repetition. The “one glimpse” of the string of images is given form in the “imagination not dead,” while only the fact that they have “vanished” at the conclusion through the term “omit” signals the “imagination dead.”²⁰ Beckett makes it clear that one can only “omit” an omission by putting something else in its place; otherwise, the act will evade perception. To “omit” depends, quite simply, upon the initial presence of something. As such, the microcosmic complexities of the rotunda are first given presence, and then put *sous rature* in order that they actively *become* the absent non-representational “timeless” elements of the world.²¹ It is the negotiation of this collision of presence and absence – the act of writing *sous rature* – that allows Beckett in the final statement to represent the rotunda “all white in the whiteness” as an image of a *blanc* nothing of the “timeless,” and to provide the form that will allow the documentation of the forces of light and dark.

Written *sous rature*, the image of the rotunda is designed to force the reader to disregard the natural laws that colour the forms of the outside world, while also allowing Beckett to

Conform with Copies
sent to Calder,
Grove
Lambert.

IMAGINATION DEAD IMAGINE

No trace anywhere of life, you say, pch, no difficulty there, imagination no dead yet, yes, good, imagination dead, imagine, islands, waters, azure, verdure, one ellipse and ~~another~~ endlessly, ~~but~~ fill all white in the whiteness the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure, diameter three feet, ~~from the ground~~ to the summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB CD divide the white ground into two semicircles AOB DOA. Lying on the ground two white bodies, each in its semicircle. White too the vault and the round wall eighteen inches high from which it springs. Go back out, a plain rotunda, all white in the whiteness, go back in, ~~solid~~ solid throughout, a ring as in the imagination the ring of bone. The light that makes all so white, no source ~~in~~ all shines with the same white shine, ground, wall, vault, bodies, no shadow, strong heat, surfaces hot but not burning, to the touch, bodies ~~vanish~~ ~~vanish~~. Go back out, move back, the fabric vanishes, ascend, it vanishes, all white in the whiteness, descend, go back in, emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness, wait, the light goes down, all grows dark together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, the light goes out, all vanishes. At the same time the temperature goes down, to reach its minimum, say freezing-point, at the same instant as the black is reached, which may seem strange, wait, more or less long, light and heat come back, all grows white and hot together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, ~~xxxxxx~~ say twenty seconds, all the greys, till the initial level is reached whence the fall began. More or less long, for there may ~~xxxxxx~~ intervals, experience shows, between end of fall and beginning of rise, pauses of varying length, from the fraction of the second to what would have occurred, in other times, other places, an eternity. ~~Such~~ remark for the other pause, between end of rise and beginning of fall, the extremes, as long as they persist, are perfectly stable, which in the case of the temperature may seem strange, in the beginning. It ~~is~~ too, experience shows, ~~that~~ rise and fall may stop short at any point and mark a pause, more or less long, before resuming, or reversing, the rise now fall, the fall rise, these in their turn to be completed, or to stop short and mark a pause, more or less long, before resuming, or again reversing, and so on, till finally one or the other extreme is reached. Such variations of rise and fall, combining in countless rhythms, ~~attend~~ ~~such~~ commonly the ~~xxxxxx~~ passage from white to black and ~~from~~ ~~black~~ ~~to~~ ~~white~~ and vice versa. The extremes alone are stable, as is stressed by the ~~word~~ to be observed when a pause occurs at some intermediate stage, no matter what its level and duration. Then all ~~xxxxxx~~ ground, wall, vault, bodies, ashen or leaden ~~xxxxxx~~ on or between the two, as may be, but on the whole, experience shows, such ~~xxxxxx~~ passage is not common. And now, often, when the light begins to fall, and along with it the heat, the movement continues ~~without~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ until, in the space of some twenty seconds, nitch black is reached and at the same instant say freezing-point. ~~xxxxxx~~ for the reverse movement, towards heat and whiteness. Next most frequent is the fall or rise with pauses of varying length in those feverish greys, without at any instant reversal of the movement. But whatever its uncertainties the return sooner or later to a temporary calm seems assured, for the moment,

undrawn
unbroken

This is a typescript of *Imagination Dead Imagine* which, in a sense, is an example of the process of writing by erasure to which Beckett alluded. Interestingly, in the prologue of the narrative, the term "vanished" is substituted for "gone," and "omit" for "leave out." Each of these examples of writing and crossing that writing out, determine that Beckett intended that the complexities of the world of the rotunda to first have presence, and only then to be put *sous rature*.

cheat the disillusionment he felt towards language as “an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.”²² Situating the narrative in the imagination allows for the reconciliation between the oppositional forces of presence and absence which are designed to override those circuits in the brain which seek to artificially organize sense data into stable mimetic replications of the forms that constitute the outside world. Therefore, while writing *sous rature* facilitates the representation of the rotunda as an image of nothingness, the narrator, with the help of the reader, demonstrates how the form of the rotunda is paradoxically something that is essentially beyond the powers of perception, and therefore is equally nothing in relation to the language which gives it form. For the reader, the experience harbors within it the feeling of being drawn into the imaginary “little fabric” of the narrator’s imagination:

No way in, go in, measure. Diameter three feet, three feet from ground to summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB CD divide the white ground into two semicircles ACB BDA. Lying on the ground two white bodies, each in its semicircle. White too the vault and the round wall eighteen inches high from which it springs. Go back out, a plain rotunda, all white in the whiteness, go back in, rap, solid throughout, a ring as in the imagination the ring of bone... Go back out, move back, the little fabric vanishes, ascend, it vanishes, all white in the whiteness, descend, go back in.(182)

The first sentence “[n]o way in, go in, measure” immediately sets the scene for the description of this paradoxical process: each time the rotunda is represented and given presence, it is simultaneously put *sous rature* and represented as a *blanc* “timeless” image of nothing. Echoing the cube/rotunda in *All Strange Away*, the fact that there is “no way in” gives the rotunda the appearance of a solid geometrical form; and yet, because it is also possible to “go in” and “measure,” this solid wall must also be absent. Once within, geometrical coordinates provide the rotunda with form and presence, (which is intensified

by the action of the reader who, rapping on its wall, proves that it is “solid throughout”); however, once inside, the reader can also “go back out” and examine its form from a position outside the canvas of the imagination. From there, depending upon where the rotunda is perceived from, it is either present against the white backdrop, or it becomes infused into an all-encompassing vanishing point, as its “white” form disappears “in the whiteness,” and becomes the image of a *blanc* space.

Beckett relies on the distinction that his narrator makes between the “white” rotunda and the “whiteness” upon which it is placed to provide the image of the rotunda as a form that fluctuates between being a perceivable presence, and a perceivable absence. While white suggests transparency, and would allow the surface to be exited and entered, as Wittgenstein observes, “we don’t say of something which looks transparent that it looks white.”²³ The white walls instill the rotunda with a presence of form that is “solid throughout” and can have “no way in.” However, what has gone unrecognized is that the phrase, “no way in, go in, measure” is intended to echo Leibniz’s characterization of the monadic universe.

According to Leibniz, each monad has “no windows through which anything may come in or go out,” and that these form a “closed system” of mirrors that reflect only each other, with God serving as the central organizing monad.²⁴ The problem, as Beckett indicates in *Murphy* (1938), is that if one removes God, Leibniz’s model of the universe has no real content other than a series of monads reflecting the nothingness of one another. Indeed, as Wilhelm Windelband explains, the “monad *a* represents the monads

b, *c*, *d*...*x*. But what is the monad *b*? It is in turn the representation of the monads *a*, *c*, *d*,...*x*. The same is true for *c*, and so on *ad infinitum*.²⁵ Remove God from the centre, and each monad reflects the nothingness of every other monad. The monad-like rotunda in *Imagination Dead Imagine* first appears to have presence – “no way in” – and to reflect the creation of the world as a “closed system” through the divine act of God. Then, by representing its form *sous rature*, the narrator describes an image that reflects nothing – an image whose white figure disappears into the “whiteness” of the ground upon which it is placed.²⁶ By employing the rotunda as an image of the microcosm and allying it to the Leibnizian idea of the monad, the rotunda becomes an image of nothing, which serves to put the notion of God as the central organizing centre of the universe *sous rature*.

Susan Brienza has argued convincingly that the paradoxical presence and absence of the rotunda bears a striking resemblance to Henri Bergson’s description of “Nothing” in his study *Creative Evolution*. For Bergson, “Nothing” is created at a point that is of equal distance from the inside and the outside of an object, “where we no longer perceive the one” nor “the other.”²⁷ Therefore, the rotunda is both present in its whiteness, and absent in “all white in the whiteness,” which together produce the image of nothingness. However, the difficulty with this theory in *Imagination Dead Imagine* is that the two are never actually seen simultaneously. Instead, Beckett describes the presence of the rotunda, then puts it *sous rature*. By writing *sous rature*, the form of the rotunda still has presence, only that presence has been crossed out to symbolize the “timeless” *blanc* space that exists beyond perception and language and therefore can only be represented as nothing. This all-encompassing presence of form and the absence of form is only realized

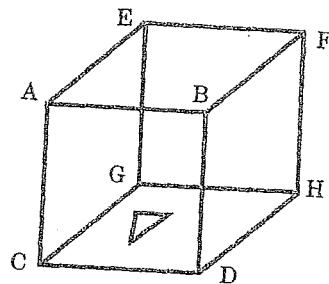
in the final production of the paradox, “all white in the whiteness.” When the two converge, the nothingness that the microcosmic rotunda signifies does not remain divorced from the chaos which it contains, but is in fact forced to mirror the chaos which it contains. Here, form is not a problem that is separate from the content:

Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is void that is not a nothingness but a virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence. Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance.²⁸

Since “white on whiteness” shows no margin or difference, “no shadow” that might produce colour,²⁹ and no way to differentiate figure from ground, the centre of the microcosm is put *sous rature* in becoming, like Wylie’s deft Leibnizian observation concerning the bust of Miss Counihan, “all centre and no circumference.”³⁰ The presence of the geometrical form of the rotunda is a centred presence because of its whiteness, and yet, being absent and transparent, is therefore also lacking a centre. Therefore, the space of the rotunda is both static and chaotic – static in its whiteness, and chaotic as “white” disappears into the “whiteness.”

Bergson’s theory of the production of “Nothing” depends on the relation between subject and object, which is always determined by the “projection line” of perspective. When Beckett concludes the above passage with: “Go back out, move back, the little fabric vanishes, ascend, it vanishes, all white in the whiteness, descend, go back in” it is the perspective that is created between the subject and the object that is being stressed. Beckett may also have had the definition of “perspective” itself in mind, which is taken

from the Latin word “perspectiva,” meaning “to see through.”³¹ To see through suggests that a form can be both solid and transparent. The change in perspective which allows the rotunda to be seen through, also suggests the way in which an object is *envisioned* in or by the mind. “Vision” can mean “to see” an object, or it can also refer to a vision that is imaginative and exceeds the boundaries of the “ideal.”³² Such paradoxical representations allow Beckett to suggest that perception only gives rise to relative instead of “absolute” truth. To recognize the paradoxical nature of the rotunda, is to envision a constantly changing form which is determined through perspective.³³



If “ABCD” is perceived to be the face of the cube, the triangle is on the inside and the apex points outward. Conversely, if “EFGH” is perceived as the face of the cube, then the triangle is consequently outside and the apex points away. Substituting the spatial geometry of the rotunda for the cube and the reader for the triangle, for the reader to enter the rotunda a change in perspective is all that is necessary to be either inside or outside of that space. The spatial geometry of the rotunda never changes as such, but the space within the rotunda itself does change position, depending upon how the mind’s eye perceives its form. Depending upon how and from where the reader perceives the object of the rotunda, the microcosmic space within the rotunda is also the macrocosmic space without the rotunda, and vice-versa. Entrance into the rotunda only depends on how it is perceived, and the reconstruction of that information by the mind’s eye. The ongoing

disappearance and appearance, the relationship of the inside space to the outside space, and the relation of the body within or without the object are all produced by the nothingness of the rotunda. By representing the microcosmic rotunda as an image of nothingness through writing *sous rature*, makes the representation of the underlying chaos possible.³⁴

Having the rotunda function like a monadic-mirror that reflects, through the presence of its own absence the absence of God, Beckett intensifies that absence, paradoxically by way of the two bodies within. To prove that they are alive, the narrator states that if one were to “[h]old a mirror to their lips, it mists” (184).³⁵ The metaphysical experience of being is reduced to the purgatorial extremes of birth and death, as experience in the world is put *sous rature*. In *Enough*, the narrator explains that, “in order from time to time to enjoy the sky he resorted to a little round mirror. Having misted it with his breath and polished it on his calf he looked in it for the constellations.”³⁶ At one level, the mist-covered mirror in *Imagination Dead Imagine* would only obscure the view of the cosmos. At another level, the mist is synonymous with the “little fabric” that constitutes the form of the rotunda; below that mist is a surface that is of an immeasurable depth and which remains invisible until an object is reflected upon its surface.

Positioned in a ying-yang “embryonic pose” on “their right sides therefore both and back to back head to arse,” the two bodies are in transformation between “birth and disappearance” in the womb-tomb rotunda. Each figure has form and presence – in that it can be perceived as opaque and differentiated from the ground. And yet, each “white

body” is without form and void, disappearing into the infinite “whiteness” of the surrounding surface. The more the narrator describes the space of the bodies – to prove that they are present – the less that is known about them for certain: “Neither fat nor thin, big nor small, the bodies seem whole and in fairly good condition, to judge by the surface exposed to view” (184). The bodies serve as an analogy for the perception of the form of the rotunda; even though they are “all stillness,” (184) on the surface, beneath them are the oppositional forces of presence and absence, of death in life. As soon as the body is given dimension, it disappears from view and becomes an image of nothingness. However, it is their perception, which is now “beyond what is humanly possible” (184), to which the narrator gives the most attention:

they might well pass for inanimate but for the left eyes which at incalculable intervals suddenly open wide and gaze in unblinking exposure long beyond what is humanly possible. Piercing pale blue the effect is striking, in the beginning. Never the two gazes together except once, when the beginning of one overlapped the end of another, for about ten seconds. (184)

In *The Lost Ones*, blue eyes are the most sensitive to the changes to the light in the cylinder, while in *Ping*, the “light blue” eyes of the being in the rectangular enclosure gradually undergo a disappearance, fading into the whiteness.³⁷ Here in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the left “piercing pale blue” eyes of each character, eyes that open at “incalculable intervals,” suggest that perception is not unified but consists of two halves of a visual perceptual field that is never in concord. Gone is the vision of unity and order that existed in “the beginning” when belief in a Christian God still reigned (only “for about ten seconds” as the narrator wryly notes). Further, the word “eye” is omitted from

the phrase “[p]iercing pale blue” (also true of *Imagination morte imaginez* and later in *Sans*) which puts perception of the unity and stability of the outside world *sous rature*.

While the natural world in the microcosmic space of the rotunda has “vanished” by wiping clean the “canvas” of the text, it is not entirely correct to state that nature (or at the very least its forces) has been absolutely omitted from the geometrical microcosm of the rotunda. The forces of nature do still exist here, but their attributes have been minimized, stripped of colour, and reconstituted to basic scientific molecular properties that Beckett’s narrator represents as the flow of “light, grey, and dark.” Indeed, these natural forces – like those in the cube/rotunda of *All Strange Away* and the cylinder of *The Lost Ones* – produce what the narrator refers to as the “little storms” within the rotunda. It is through the nothingness of the rotunda produced through Beckett’s writing *sous rature* that the underlying chaos that evades perception and complicates all representations of being can be perceived.

In order to produce this fluid flow of convection, Libchaber’s “Helium-in-a-Small-Box” experiment is reducible at the start to the manipulation of liquid helium through a change in temperature. By heating the bottom of the container, the change in temperature at the base causes the onset of motion in the liquid helium, which expands as it is warmed, becoming, as a result, lighter than the cooler liquid helium above. Consequently, the helium at the bottom begins to rise up the middle of the container by pushing aside the cooler liquid which is subsequently forced down along its sides. Convection, therefore, is produced through a variation in temperature, in that upon reaching the top, the heated

helium bifurcates left and right, cools, and then descends down each side of the wall. This process of convection, according to James Gleick, occurs “at a few degrees above absolute zero, a mere one-thousandth of a degree” and continues in a fluid flow through the consistency of temperature between the warmer helium at the bottom and the cooler helium at the top.³⁸

The same process of thermal convection produced through an increase and decrease in temperature occurs in the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine*. In the rotunda, convection is created through the stable flow which begins with the narrator’s documentation of light and incumbent heat reaching their maximum brightness and temperature, which is then followed by a gradual falling of the temperature, and descent of the light, empirically documented through different degrees of “grey” before finally settling to dark. Beckett’s narrator, therefore, is describing a stable system of convection which, like Libchaber’s experiment, is dependent upon temperature. In the passage below, the narrator describes the first phase of the convection process that sees light and heat shift to dark and cold:

Emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness, wait, the light goes down, all grows dark together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, the light goes out, all vanishes. At the same time the temperature goes down to reach its minimum, say freezing point, at the same instant black is reached, which may seem strange.(182-3)

When “the light goes down” the temperature (the narrator explains) also “goes down, to reach its minimum, say freezing point, at the same instant that” grey gives way to black. While the narrator concedes that all of this “may seem strange,” this first pattern, which produces the first phase of convection from light to dark, from heat to cold within the

rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, adheres to the specific laws of physics attributed to the process of convection established in Libchaber's experiment. At the same time, the narrator, as he did in representing the spatial geometry of the rotunda, is representing the appearance of a stable and ordered system in order that the underlying chaos can be better perceived.

It is the temporal variations rather than spatial documentation that become the means of measuring the production of the fluid flow of convection. For Beckett's narrator, it is time that is used to establish the rise and the fall of the light and the heat, the darkness and the cold, in order to map the ongoing process of convection in the rotunda so that the onset of the "little storms" of turbulence can be recognized as temporal moments of difference that disrupt the repetition of convection. Therefore, having described the second phase of convection with the rotunda reaching the minimum of dark and cold, the narrator then shows us the opposite process, in this instance documenting the rise of the light and the heat which are measured through temporal spacing. The reader need only:

Wait, more or less long, light and heat come back, all grows white and hot together, ground, wall vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, till the initial level is reached whence the fall began.(183)

So, for Beckett's narrator, the process is stable, and the flow develops over "twenty seconds" before the initial level is once again reached. Time, then, becomes the ruling concern in documenting and graphing the stability of the system. Speaking of Libchaber's experiment, Gleick explains that temporal documentation made variations in the flow of convection appear as "rhythms that would expose themselves as change over time. Time is the playing field and the yardstick," and by squeezing space down to an

almost “one-dimensional point,” variations could be measured and graphed.³⁹ In *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the changes in the temperature produce a temporal documentation of “about twenty seconds” the light and the heat rise in the rotunda, and the dark and cold fall, together producing a steady bifurcation of convection that serves to mask the underlying chaos of the “big buzzing blooming confusion” of sense data.

Therefore, stability in the fluid flow of convection is graphed over time by measuring temperature. In the “Helium-in-a-Small-Box” experiment, Libchaber found that by heating the liquid helium at the bottom of the container and with the onset of the equilibrium motion, all of the subsequent phases of convection followed the first bifurcation, and he recorded a temperature that remained “more or less” steady. As James Gleick points out, “the first bifurcation remains stable because the temperature at the bottom and the top of the container remain stable, producing, as a result, a straight line graph.”⁴⁰ To maintain the flow that produces a stable motion of convection, in other words, the temperatures at the bottom and at the top of that space must each remain constant. This consistency is to be found in Beckett’s account of convection in the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Beckett’s narrator, speaking of the highs and the lows of the light and the dark, notes that the “extremes, as long as they last, are perfectly stable, which in the case of the temperature may seem strange, in the beginning”(183). Indeed, the narrator again emphasizes later that “the extremes alone are stable” (183). Both Libchaber and Beckett take pains to establish that an equilibrium is reached between the high temperature and the low temperature which produces a consistency in

the convection flow, each system of which can be graphed so that differences – the production of turbulence and chaos – can be properly identified.

Through representing the spatial geometry of the rotunda *sous rature* – as a form that is both present and absent and therefore an image that is a positive nothing – Beckett is able to represent the underlying chaos that exists below the surface of sensory perception. The fluid flow of convection, which represents the appearance of stable forces inherent in the natural world is, equally, little more than chaos masquerading as order. For Libchaber, the intention was to understand and document how and why turbulence erupted within a stable flow of convection. For Beckett's narrator, the "little storms" of turbulence reveal the chaos that resides beneath any appearance of order. The presence of the absence of the rotunda reveals a world that is infused with nothingness and the underlying chaos an image of the confusion that the nothingness brings. Beckett represents the world as the presence of an absence, an unknown nothingness, and the chaos that only contributes to the metaphysical plight of being.

Following two years of close analysis, Libchaber found that a gradual increase in heat caused instability to find its way into the system, producing as a result, "a kink in each roll" of convection, which he referred to as a "wobble." This 'wobble' shows up as a changing temperature, up and down between two values."⁴¹ While the highs and the lows of the temperature in the "Helium-in-a-Small-Box" remain consistent, a change in the fluid flow of convection is produced through an increase in heat between these two extremes, producing as a result, a "wobble" that indicated the onset of turbulence.

Similarly, in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, more heating in the rotunda, coupled with the process of cooling, also produces a variance in the flow between light and dark, and a difference in the two extremes of temperature. These changes in the flow of a stable system of highs and lows measured over time, and the chaotic patterns that are produced and that cannot be anticipated, are identified by Beckett's narrator as a "pause." Each "pause" produces two important discoveries concerning convection and the chaotic production of turbulence: the first is that the timing of the system that measures the highs and the lows is increasingly chaotic, as the "duration" that was recorded as the "twenty seconds" between each bifurcation of convection becomes more unpredictable. The second effect is that each ascent to light, or conversely each descent to darkness contains, in the change in the molecular make-up of air through temperature variation, a possible change in the direction of the fluid flow, and a change in the graphing between the highs and lows in the rotunda. Once again, through his omniscient perception, Beckett's narrator is able to perceive the chaos housed beneath the surface of order and stability. The reader must only wait,

[m]ore or less long, for there may intervene, experience shows, between end of fall and beginning of rise, pauses of varying length, from the fraction of a second to what would have seemed in other times, other places, an eternity. Same remark for the other pause, between end of rise and beginning of fall. (183)

As such, the narrator is able to perceive the production of these "pauses" in the convection flow of the rotunda, which are strikingly similar to Libchaber's documentation of the "wobble." The "pause" and the "wobble" each show up as a change in temperature, and both mark, through their change in the fluid motion of convection

between heat and cold, the onset of turbulence. Physicists have since recognized that turbulence comes into effect when a desirable speed is exceeded and particles undergo transformations, as individual molecules begin to bump into one another. Such interaction changes the shape and the temporal properties of the fluid flow of thermal convection, which in turn become increasingly turbulent and chaotic.

“Turbulence,” says Gleick, is “a mess of disorder at all scales, small eddies within larger ones. It is unstable, it is highly dissipative, meaning that turbulence drains energy and creates drag. It is motion turned random.”⁴² Beckett’s narrator similarly recognizes that the steady flow from heat to cold and from cold to heat is also marked by the “small eddies” of these “pauses.” The “pauses” in the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine* make the measurement of time chaotic since the duration of rise or fall during these pauses are “of varying length, from the fraction of a second to what would have seemed in other times, other places, an eternity” (183). Each “pause” in the rise and fall of convection produces turbulence, as fluid “motion [is] turned random” and flow becomes totally unpredictable. However, because turbulence in the rotunda is produced through heating *or* cooling, this, at first glance, suggests an important difference between Libchaber’s experiment – which defines the onset of turbulence only through an increase in heat – and the narrator’s observations. And yet, this difference between Beckett’s experiment in the rotunda and Libchaber’s “Helium-in-a-Small-Box” is not that great if one considers Beckett’s comment on “identified contraries” in his essay “Dante ... Bruno . Vico .. Joyce” on *Finnegans Wake*:

The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent.
Minimal heat equals minimal cold. Consequently transmutations are

circular. The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of another. Therefore not only do the minima coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima with the maxima in the succession of transmutations.⁴³

Giordano Bruno's idea of "identified contraries" is essential to Beckett's treatment of convection in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. The minimum of one contrary is dependent on the maximum of the other. (The minimum of heat in *Imagination Dead Imagine* is the maximum of cold). Minimum darkness is the same as maximum light, while minimum light is equivalent to maximum darkness. Because of their polar oppositions, the two produce the same effect of turbulence because they are in essence one and the same, and therefore in concord with Libchaber's account of the increase in heat which produces the onset of turbulence during the fluid flow of convection.

The onset of turbulence in the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine* – which subverts the convection fluid flow of light and dark – allows the forces of chaos to introduce moments of difference into the repetition characteristic of fluid flow. The narrator explains that, while the "extremes, as long as they last, are perfectly stable," the rise and the fall produces a second pattern that is chaotic and not measurable. This second pattern, that is produced through the flux of heat and cold, causes the stable pattern of rise and fall, fall and rise, to cease to follow a distinct temporal mapping. In the spatial geometry of the rotunda, the onset of turbulence is produced through the "grey phase," which produces the "pauses," and is finally revealed by Beckett's narrator as the source of the "little storms" that expose the chaos that lies obscured to sight beneath the fluid flow of convection:

It is possible too, experience shows, for rise and fall to stop short at any point and mark a pause, more or less long, before resuming, or reversing, the rise now fall, the fall rise, these in their turn to be completed, or to stop short and mark a pause, more or less long, before resuming, or again reversing, and so on, till finally one or the other extreme is reached. Such variations of rise and fall, combining in countless rhythms, commonly attend the passage from white and heat to black and cold, and vice versa. (183)

Beckett constructs the language of this section to mirror the same process from a fluid flow of ideas to an interruption determined by an aside that produces a pause. Each pause in the fluid flow of ideas introduces a grey area into the proceedings and thus mirrors the fluid flow from light to dark which is also marked by pauses and the production of the grey chaos. Turbulence which sees the fluid flow of convection infected by a “wobble” that is identified as a change in the temperature between “two stable” extremes occurs during the in-between grey phase of fluid flow. Beckett’s narrator explains that these “pauses” which produce the “variations” in the extremes of temperature, are not subject to measurement due to the fact that they are thoroughly chaotic. Each “pause” produces a lesser rise, and the system, as a result, goes from a steady stream with predictable fluctuation between a high and low temperature, to an unpredictable, and essentially chaotic pattern that can change direction at any time.

Further, the effect of the internal chaos on the spatial geometry of the rotunda also has an effect on its very structure: “the extremes alone are stable as is stressed by the vibration to be observed when a pause occurs at some intermediate stage, no matter what its level or duration” (183). Due to these turbulent “little storms” and because they are “never twice the same storm” the intermediate “grey phase” produces friction and turbulence,

and with these, vibration, that challenge the stability of the rotunda and the two bodies: “Then all vibrates, ground, wall, vault, bodies, ashen or leaden or between the two” (183).⁴⁴ Through his narrator, Beckett is able to identify the chaos that resides beneath the appearance of order, and that undermines the apparent stability not only of the spatial geometry of the microcosmic rotunda but equally of the macrocosm that houses its ever-changing form. In doing so, Beckett is able to reveal the way in which this new form of spatial geometry not only “accommodates” the chaos, but is really only chaos masquerading as order – the effects of which reveal the very instability inherent in the creation myth that purports a divine geometrician, creating order from the chaotic universe.

Therefore, the light and dark which are induced by the turbulence of the “little storms” of the “grey” tempests in *Imagination Dead Imagine* serve as the most material aspects of Beckett’s narrative. The natural forces of convection and turbulence are re-represented within “the little fabric” of the geometrical space of the rotunda as an image of the chaos of the entire macrocosm. By revealing the spatial geometry of the rotunda as an image of nothingness through writing *sous rature*, and the forces within its form as chaotic, Beckett not only anticipates a breakthrough in modern physics, but also makes a statement on the appearance of a unified, geometrical cosmos as being thoroughly chaotic. In the end, the white world of the rotunda disappears into the whiteness, and the reader is left with a *blanc* image of the nothingness, the instability of the geometrical shape as little more than a figment of the imagination thoroughly de-centered in the macrocosm: “No, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere, and no question now of

ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness, to still see if they lie in the stress of that storm, or of a worse storm, or in the black dark for good, or in the great whiteness unchanging, and if not what they are doing” (185). The final image of the microcosmic rotunda is a denial of the afterlife that is the result of the chaos of the entire macrocosm. The rotunda has become a “white speck lost in the whiteness” an image *sous rature*, that combines the nothingness and the chaos that together negate any notion of order that might exist “elsewhere.”

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1991), p. 317. All future references are to this edition.

² Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1964), p. 128. All future references are to this edition.

³ In the Calder and Boyars first edition of *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1966), translated from *Imagination morte imaginez* (1965), the text is referred to as a novel by the publishers: "The present short work was conceived as a novel, started as a novel, and in spite of its brevity, remains a novel, a work of fiction from which the author has removed all but the essentials, having first imagined them and created them." It is also interesting to note that Beckett has stated that *All Strange Away* was written "I imagine on the way to *Imagination morte imaginez*." Quoted in James Knowlson's "Editorial," in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no.3 (Summer 1978).

⁴ Herbert Blau, "Meanwhile, Follow the Bright Angels" in *Tulane Drama Review*, 5 (September 1960), p. 91.

⁵ Samuel Beckett, Letter to Avigdor Arikha 14 March 1965 trans. in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 472. All future references are to this edition.

⁶ The difficulty of this little "novel" has been acknowledged by other critics. For example, Brian Finney in "A Reading of Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*" in *Twentieth Century Literature* 17 (1971): 65-71, writes: "Samuel Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine* is at once a powerful and beautiful piece of writing while being, one has to admit, appallingly difficult to understand."

⁷ It is worth reiterating that the relationship of Beckett's process of writing *sous rature* is subtly connected to Jacques Derrida's notion of *sous rature*. The closest connection to Derrida is found in *Ping/Bing* which I discuss in chapter seven of this study. It is, however, interesting to note that in his first article on van Veldes in 1945: "each time that one wishes to make words do a true work of transference, each time one wishes to make them express something other than words, they align themselves in such a way as to cancel each other out" in John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 23. Here in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Beckett's use of writing *sous rature* begs the question as to whether the failure to produce the invisibility below the surface in modern painting makes modern painting modern, while producing this invisibility would be part of postmodern painting. If this is the case, Beckett's representation of the nothingness of the image, and therefore the underlying complexities of that image, make him (at least from this perspective) a post-modern writer.

⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 170. All future references are to this edition.

⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), Volume I, p. 231.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that when Beckett wrote *Imagination Dead Imagine*, scientific inquiries into convection and turbulence were only able to hypothesize what forces caused a linear and seemingly stable system to become nonlinear and finally chaotic. For further information concerning Beckett's interest in physics see Brother I. Pius Duggan, F.S.C. "Relativity, Quantum Theory and the Novels of Samuel Beckett," Diss. (Loyola University, 1971). According to Duggan Beckett was aware of these two works: Paul Arthur Schilpp, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher – Scientist* (New York: Tutor Publishing, 1957) and Sir James Genes, *The Mysterious Universe* (New York: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1930).

¹¹ All future references to Albert Libchaber's "Helium-in-a-Small-Box" are from James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1987).

¹² *Ibid.* p. 207.

¹³ Shimon Levy, "Does Beckett Admit the Chaos?" in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* 6 (1997), p. 95.

¹⁴ Libchaber's "Helium-in-a-Small-Box" is necessarily smaller (about the size of a lemon seed) than the spatial geometry of the rotunda, due to the difference between the ultra-low viscosity of helium, and the medium viscosity of air which, as is the case in the rotunda, necessitates a larger space.

¹⁵ The "eye of prey" has been the cause of some speculation in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. For example, Ruby Cohn in *Back to Beckett* asks, "Does the eye belong to the narrator, the reader, or both?" (p.250). The "eye of prey" could, as I indicate in this chapter, be the immersion of the artist in the object which would signal the means by which the form as represented as coherent and ordered can be overcome thus allowing the underlying chaos to be perceived. Another possibility is that the "eye of prey" may be understood through *Film*, as the eye "E" tries to capture object "O" – "the former in flight, the latter in pursuit" in Samuel Beckett, "Film" in *Samuel Beckett: The Collected Shorter Plays* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 163. The "eye" may also be from Schopenhauer and the idea of the "investigating eye" in *The World as Will and Idea* Trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), volume III book VI, p. 406, or the notion of the "eye as the dark point" (VII p.285). All future references are to this edition.

¹⁶ James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1979), p. 145

¹⁷ Beckett may also be drawing on his reading of Schopenhauer. In Book 3 of *The World as Will and Idea* the relation of the subject to the object is considered in detail:

Raised by the power of the mind, a person relinquishes the usual way of looking at things, stops tracing, as the forms of the principle of sufficient reason prompt him to do, only their interrelatedness, the final goal of which is always a relation to his own will. He ceases to consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, and looks simply and solely at the what. He does not allow abstract thoughts, the concepts of the reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but, instead, gives the whole power of his mind to perception, immerses himself entirely in this...He loses himself in this object...i.e., he forgets his very individuality, his will, and continues to exist only as the pure subject, the clear mirror of the object...he can no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one...If the subject has to such an extent passed out of all relation to will, then what is known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the Idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade.

For Schopenhauer, the intention of the subject in relation to the object must be a suspension of the will, to in fact become will-less through an immersed of the subject into the object. In doing so, the subject can arrive at the "Idea" of the object itself. In *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the relationship between the narrator and the reader is a lesson in just such a process of losing the will to arrive at the truth concerning the "Idea" of the rotunda. Here, the reader may in fact be the image of the artist moving into the object so that the desire to represent will be one in which the underlying complexities can be revealed.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), pp. 182-5. All future references are to this edition.

¹⁹ James Hansford, "Imagination Dead Imagine: The Imagination and Its Context" in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* no.7 (Spring, 1982) p. 53.

²⁰ The term "omit," therefore, is dependent upon having something in which to omit and put *sous rature* in order to leave a positive nothingness in the place of no thing. It is significant that in the early drafts of the French *Imagination morte imaginez* the term "omit" first appeared as "leave unsaid" (RUL ms. 1541/1) and "leave out" (RUL ms. 1541/2). Both of these mss. are located at the Reading University Library Beckett Archive. Changing the term to "omit" allows Beckett to produce the act of erasure.

²¹ In the original French text, the terms "pff" and muscade" meaning "presto!" and "magician," respectively, suggest that the disappearance of the rotunda is intended to echo Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Further, the fact that the narrator refers to the rotunda as the

"little fabric" echoes "the baseless fabric" of Prospero's "vision." Here Beckett is stressing the relation of the subject to the object: the subject's perception of the world and reconstruction within the mind is a mere fabrication; the eye observes the chaos which is then reconstituted into a coherent totality.

²² Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett talks about Beckett*. John Gruen, *Vogue* (London: February 1970), p. 108.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p.50.

²⁴ G.W. Leibniz "Monadology" in *Discourse on Metaphysics, Correspondence with Arnould* trans. George R. Montgomery (LaSalle Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company 1962), p. 252.

²⁵ Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2. trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 423, note 5.

²⁶ For a brief allusion to the importance of Democritus in Beckett's work, see the first chapter of the present study.

²⁷ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912). Bergson writes:

The image, then, properly so called, of a suspension of everything is never formed by thought. The effort by which we strive to create this image simply ends in making us swing to and fro between the vision of an outer and that of an inner reality. In this coming and going of our mind between the without and the within, there is a point, at equal distance from both, in which it seems that to us that we no longer perceive the one, and that we do not yet perceive the other: it is there that the image of "Nothing" is formed. pp. 294-95.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 50.

²⁹ J.W. von Goethe, *Theory of Colors* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1970).

³⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 60.

³¹ For a discussion of perspective and the projection line see Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

³² A similar point is made by Susan Brienza in her study, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 128.

³³ For a discussion of the Necker cube see Michael Holt, *Mathematics in Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 48.

³⁴ Further, the relationship of the rotunda to the infinite white ground upon which it rests also guarantees that the reader (as the explorer) is always within the space of the rotunda since it is essentially without borders but an infinite expanse of “whiteness.”

³⁵ Samuel Beckett, “Breath,” in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Shorter Plays* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 211. Beckett offers this description of the scene: “Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.” The exhalation of breath that mists the mirror is reminiscent of Beckett’s play *Breath*, where being is represented between a “faint cry” and immediate “inspiration,” followed by the “expiration” of breath and the ensuing silence. In *Imagination Dead Imagine*, holding a mirror to their mouths could in fact prove they are alive, or suggest the expiration of breath which would signal death, again as in *Breath*.

³⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Enough*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 190.

³⁷ The blue eyes are certainly an autobiographical allusion to Beckett’s own eyes, the point being that we always write from our own experience.

³⁸ Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* p. 203

³⁹ Ibid. p. 203.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 204.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 204-5.

⁴² Ibid. p. 199.

⁴³ Samuel Beckett, “Dante...Bruno. Vico .. Joyce” in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 21.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that in a letter Beckett wrote in 1937, he specifically identifies grey with chaos here in relation to the mind and the play of light and dark: “The real consciousness is chaos, a grey commotion of mind with no premises or conclusions or problems of solutions or cases or judgements.” Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 249.

CHAPTER SIX

The Vanquished and the Mystical Experience of Nothing in *The Lost Ones*

“Sedendo et quiescendo anima efficitur sapiens” (By sitting and remaining quiet the mind is made wise).¹

Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare post-natal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of *percipere* but of *percipi*. His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real.²

The history of *The Lost Ones*, like so many of the other “residua” prose written in the 1960s, begins with the difficulties that Beckett encountered with writing and completing the text.³ Originally written in French under the title *Le Dépeupleur*, it was begun in 1966 and then “abandoned because of intractable complexities.”⁴ These consisted primarily in how to conclude the narrative, when it appeared to be making good on the narrator’s repeated allusions to the “unthinkable end” (222).⁵ Accordingly, Beckett added a fifteenth section just prior to the French text’s publication in 1970 that not only projected the future and final state of the entire population of lost bodies, but also determined the *telos* of the search as the condition of the “five vanquished.”⁶ While *The Lost Ones* has been subject to a wide variety of critical approaches, to argue, as earlier critics have, that the searchers are unaware throughout the narrative that the five vanquished are the object of their search, and further, that the vanquished represent the experience of “non-being,” is a crucial oversight that has had serious consequences for how the text has been read.⁷

Considered more closely, the vanquished actually represent the mystical experience of Nothing, and it is this mystical state that the other searchers attempt to emulate as the most direct means of escape from the cylinder world. In *The Lost Ones*, the vanquished represent the optimum state of being within the mystical sanctuary of the microcosm, released from the metaphysical desire to search for an unattainable object by becoming “pure, will-less...timeless subject[s] of knowledge.”⁸ It is only by properly identifying the vanquished as the mystics in *The Lost Ones* that it becomes possible to determine the means by which Beckett puts the vanquished, the desire to search for a way out of the “intractable complexities” of the world, and therefore the world itself, *sous rature*.

Beckett employs a variety of techniques to produce the act of *sous rature* throughout the later “residua” texts. However, it is quintessentially the consistent representation of what remains once his writing is put *sous rature* that demands the most serious attention. Beckett’s technique of writing *sous rature* intentionally forces language to fail by representing and then crossing out all that is represented in language, as the means to express that “timeless” self and world which always exists outside the “zone” of representation. As a result, “style” gives way to the “vision” of what is expressed through the failure of expression, which is the residual remnant of the *blanc* nothingness that allows Beckett to express that “beyond what is said there is nothing,” and to encompass within that “timeless” nothingness all that is unknown concerning the metaphysical experience of being.⁹ However, this *blanc* nothingness that remains when language is put *sous rature* in the earlier “residua” texts is re-appropriated by Beckett in *The Lost Ones* into the mystical experience of “Nothing” through the five vanquished. Indeed, this

mystical form of Nothing represents an achievement of the “timeless” self which draws an explicit parallel to Schopenhauer’s writings on the mystical experience, which Beckett most certainly would have been familiar with from his early philosophical readings.¹⁰

Once the individual has overcome the fear of death, Schopenhauer explains,

do we freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but, conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this our world, which is so real, with all its suns and milky ways – is nothing.¹¹

Here, Schopenhauer alludes to the mystical experience of Nothing, reserved for “those in whom the will has turned and denied itself.” It is this, mystical experience of self-denial that characterizes the vanquished, and the sometimes erratic behavior of the other lost bodies. Therefore, instead of representing being and the world in language and then putting that language *sous rature* in order to reveal the impossibility of capturing the “timeless” in language (and further representing the positive nothingness that is the metaphor and the residua of such a failure), it is conversely the manifestations of Nothing/Nothingness associated with the mystical vanquished that allows Beckett to put the cylinder world, the desire to search, and finally the five vanquished themselves *sous rature* over the course of *The Lost Ones*.

In *The Lost Ones*, the vanquished exist on the ante-area or “outer-belt” (216) of the cylinder, either “sitting or standing” along the wall (“lying down is unheard of in the cylinder”) outside of the “counter-carrier wise motion” of the searchers and those carrying the ladders “eddy-wise” to their favorite “niches or alcoves” located along “an imaginary line running midway between floor and ceiling” (203). However, it is most

specifically the status of the eyes that is the source of the difference in the behavior of the lost bodies. Unlike the searchers with their “devouring” (210) eyes and the “slow deterioration” of their vision as it is “ruined” by the “fiery flickering murk” (214) of the light, the “eyes [of the vanquished] are cast down or closed [which is intended to] signify abandonment” (211). In fact, when the narrator describes the eyes of the vanquished in greater detail, the mystical experience of seeing Nothing begins to take form: “And the thinking being coldly intent on all these data and evidences could scarcely escape at the close of his analysis the mistaken conclusion that instead of speaking of the vanquished with the slight taint of pathos attaching to the term it would be more correct to speak of the blind and leave it at that” (214). The narrator stresses the fact that the blindness of the vanquished is not to be interpreted as negative; in fact, it becomes increasingly clear that the vanquished do not represent a literal form of blindness, but an alternative experience of perception that allows them to literally see the mystical “Nothing,” which is the result of having turned their gaze inwards into the microcosm of the mind.

The narrator offers an important explanation as to why the lost bodies continue to search – even though no meaningful object of the search can be identified – which serves to further elucidate the mystical experience of the vanquished. According to the narrator, “none looks inside himself where none can be” (211). In *Samuel Beckett’s New Worlds*, Susan Brienza unpacks this statement and provides an important perspective: “Somewhere among these negatives [the “none” and the “none”] resides a positive statement: the vanquished have found their lost minds within themselves; ...only the vanquished look inward because only they are locating their lost ones.”¹² This

observation, however, can be taken a step further; because the vanquished are physically present, and yet mentally absent (having turned their vision inwards), they represent the presence of an absence and therefore an image of the “timeless” self as nothing, which is signified by the pronoun “none,” and the action “looks inside himself.” Looking within, the vanquished experience the mystical Nothing encompassed in the phrase, “where none,” or Nothing, “can be.” Thus, mystical blindness is produced by turning the direction of the gaze inwards, which puts the image of the vanquished *sous rature*, and represents them as embodying the “none” of a positive *blanc* a-spatial nothingness. Therefore, the vanquished are physically present in the cylinder world, and yet, at the same time, mentally absent through looking for the mystical Nothing within the microcosm of their own minds.

In *The Lost Ones* then, the life of the mind takes precedence over the life of the body. This Cartesian undercurrent also contributes another important aspect to Beckett’s representation of the vanquished as mystics. While the mystical blindness distinguishes the vanquished from the other lost bodies, the narrator also makes an important distinction between the vanquished and the “ex-searchers.” On the one hand, the ex-searchers are referred to as “semi-sages” because their presence in the cylinder world, like the behavior of Neary in *Murphy*, appears to contradict the wisdom and the passivity that are two of the characteristics of the sage. The narrator explains that these “semi-sages,” “cling to this as to a homage due to them and [are] morbidly susceptible to the least want of consideration. A sedentary searcher stepped on instead of over is capable of such an outburst of fury as to throw the entire cylinder into a ferment” (210). The

vanquished, on the other hand, experience a certain amount of abuse from the other searchers, and yet unlike the ex-searchers, “may be walked on without their reacting” (210).¹³ This distinction between the outbursts of violence in the “semi-sages,” and the passivity of the vanquished, is intended to underscore the vanquished as mystics. Schopenhauer explains that to be a mystic is to welcome every “injury, ignominy and insult,”¹⁴ and Beckett has the vanquished represent this aspect of the mystical experience which allows them to suffer any kind of physical manipulation at the hands of the other searchers:

Direct action with a view to their elucidation is generally reserved for the persons of the sedentary or the vanquished. Face or back to the wall these normally offer but a single aspect and so many have to be turned the other way. But whatever there is motion as in the arena or among the watchers and the possibility of encompassing the object there is no call for such manipulations. There are times of course when a body has to be brought to a stand and disposed in a certain position to permit the inspection at close hand of a particular part or a search for a scar or birthblot for example. (222)

In this passage, Beckett describes the vanquished as representing the mystical experience of Nothing. The bodies of the vanquished can be manipulated by any of the other searchers because they have ceased – at least to a certain extent – to exist as physical spatial beings. They have turned their gaze inwards, and it is this mystical ability to be physically present and yet mentally absent from the cylinder world that continuously draws the searchers to the vanquished in order “to permit the inspection at close hand of a particular part” (222). Further, because the vanquished no longer exist strictly in a physical sense, in that they have become “blind” by turning their gaze inwards into the mind, their bodies are essentially immaterial.



Chacun son Dépeupleur

1

espace où des corps vont cherchant chacun son dépeupleur

assez vaste pour permettre de chercher longuement en vain

assez restreint pour qu'à la longue toute fuite soit vaine

~~est~~ ^{est} l'intérieur d'un cylindre régulier surbaissé ayant cinquante mètres de pourtour et seize de haut pour l'harmonie

2

éclairage

sa grande faiblesse

sa couleur ocre indicible

son omniprésence comme si les quelque cent vingt mille centimètres carrés de surface totale émettaient chacun sa lueur

la sorte de halètement qui l'agite et qui s'arrête de loin en loin tel un souffle sur sa fin

tous se figent alors

leur ~~xxxxxx~~ séjour va peut-être finir

au bout de quelques secondes tout reprend

3

conséquences de cet éclairage pour l'oeil qui cherche le visage uniquement vu et mal ~~une fois~~ en songe

à deux pas si par miracle c'est le bon il sera reconnaissable

à trois il y aura doute

à quatre visage de nom seulement

et conséquences pour l'oeil qui ne cherchant plus fixe le sol ou se lève vers le lointain plafond où il ne peut y avoir personne

4

température

une respiration plus lente la fait osciller entre chaud et froid

elle passe de l'un à l'autre extrême en quatre secondes environ

An early manuscript of *Le Dépeupleur*.

While the “eyes [of the vanquished] are cast down or closed [which is intended to] signify abandonment” (211), coupled with the fact that “some [of the vanquished] content themselves with opening their eyes no more,” the vanquished will also on occasion participate in the search. According to the narrator, the “spent eyes [of the vanquished] may have fits of the old cravings just as those who having renounced the ladder suddenly take to it again” (211), which suggests that they “have still some way to go” (212). While in the past this observation has contributed to the difficulty of identifying the vanquished as mystics, the allusion to the “spent eyes” of the vanquished continues to suggest that the vanquished – even when experiencing “fits of the old cravings” still exhibit the mystical blindness that puts the desire to search *sous rature*. In fact, in direct opposition to the futility of the other searcher’s search, Beckett represents the “old cravings” of the vanquished as a metaphor for the overriding importance of locating the “timeless” self that is the mystical experience of Nothing. Thus, while the vanquished will on occasion search, their search is a metaphor for the search for the transcendence of worldly desire, and the ultimate experience of the mystical state of Nothing that is attained each time the search is abandoned:

They [the vanquished] may stray unseeing through the throng indistinguishable to the eye of flesh from the still unrelenting. These recognize them and make way. They may wait their turn at the foot of the ladders and when it comes ascend to the niches or simply leave the ground. They may crawl blindly in the tunnels in search of nothing. (211)

When the vanquished do leave their places on the cylinder wall, the object of their search is represented *sous rature*; that is, instead of having absolutely no desired goal – which is implied in terms of the other searchers throughout the narrative – Beckett has the vanquished search most specifically for the mystical experience of Nothing. Further, this

search, far from being hopeless, is the metaphysical search of being – the need to seek out the presence of nothing that is in Schopenhauerian terms, the problematical source of every failed attempt to secure absolute knowledge concerning the experience of being in the world. As such, the presence of the search is indicated by the vanquished, “who may stray unseeing through the throng” (211), and yet, the absence of attainment – “in search of nothing” – puts their search *sous rature*. They are, in other words, literally “in search of nothing.” As a result, the search is fueled by the *desire* to search, and yet the objective of their desire has been re-represented not as attainment, but as the absence of obtainment – to obtain the presence of the absence of Nothing that is the central experience of the “timeless” mystic.

This experience of the mystical Nothing which is manifest in Beckett’s representation of the vanquished is the same experience that the other searchers attempt to replicate. The most explicit example is in terms of the complex “laws” that regulate the ascent to the “niches or alcoves” and descent from the ladders back to the floor of the cylinder.¹⁵ At times, a climber will “exceed the allotted time” (209) on the ladder “due to a temporary derangement of his inner timepiece” (209). This allusion to the “derangement” of the climber’s “inner timepiece,” finds its closest parallel to the *Le Kid* (1931) where time provides one of the main sources of comedy in the play. “The classical unity of time,” James Knowlson comments, “was shown [in performance] being observed literally by a ‘silent figure seated on a ladder and smoking a pipe [playing] Einsteinian tricks with time’ by moving the hands of a large clock attached to a painted backdrop. The silent actor was supposed to fall asleep from time to time and be roused by one of the other

shouting at him or shaking the ladder; waking with a jolt, he then moved the hands of the clock frantically forward.”¹⁶ In *The Lost Ones*, the narrator’s description of the climbers bears a striking attempt to mimic the mystical “timeless” Nothing that the vanquished have achieved – and moreover – the vanquished who, climb the ladders “simply [to] leave the ground” (211):

But the ladders do not serve only as vehicles to the niches and tunnels and those whom these have ceased if only temporarily to entice use them simply to get clear of the ground. They mount to the level of their choice and there stay and settle standing as a rule with their faces to the wall. This family of climbers too is liable to exceed the allotted time. It is in order then for him due next for the ladder to climb in the wake of the offender and by means of one or more thumps on the back bring him back to a sense of his surroundings. (209)

Like the vanquished who will ascend only to a certain level of the ladder and who are at times seen with either “face or back to the wall” (222) in order to signify the abandonment of the search, an unspecified number of the climbers also exhibit the same behavior by remaining stationary on the ladders with their faces turned to the wall. Illumination only exists for those who stop on the way up and abandon the impossible search. Indeed, such catatonic pauses are remindful of the comment in *Molloy* that, “to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker.”¹⁷

When a searcher “ceases to search” he, like the vanquished, “starts to find.”¹⁸ However, these attempts to experience the same sense of abandonment as the vanquished – of being physically present and yet mentally absent from the cylinder world – proves impossible to sustain. The other searchers recognize that the experience is an artificial one, and

“wake” the offender “by means of one or more thumps” (209). Once roused, the searcher once again finds himself back in the arena of the futile search for meaning shackled – like the other lost bodies – to the insatiable “devouring” hunger of the search. “Existence off the ladder,” is to forego the mystical experience of the vanquished who look inwards and perceive the Nothing “where none can be” (211).

The presence of the ladders in *The Lost Ones* should also draw attention to their importance in Beckett’s early fiction (*Murphy*, *Watt*, *The Expelled*) as symbols of unattainable knowledge.¹⁹ In *The Lost Ones*, the ladders symbolize the desire for knowledge, given that they “seem rather to shed than receive light” (215). However, their ability to lead to knowledge is crossed out by the narrator when he remarks, “with the slight reserve that light is not the word” (215). The ladders are the means to attain the light of knowledge, and yet light, and therefore knowledge, are “not the [right] word[s].” In effect, the ladders represent nothingness – the presence of a form that could lead to knowledge and paradoxically the absence of that knowledge that they appear to represent. Further, the fact that half of the rungs are missing and that if “only every second one were missing no great harm would be done. But the want of three in a row calls for acrobatics” (203) contributes to Beckett’s constructing the ladders *sous rature*. While the rungs suggest the possibility of ascending to the illumination of knowing, the missing rungs render that ascent difficult.²⁰ Thus, the fifteen ladders in *The Lost Ones*, like the reader’s experience of reading the fifteen sections, are structures that join both the known and the unknown together – a direct expression of the quest to nothingness to which they always lead.

It is equally significant that the mystical vanquished will at times also undertake a mock search.²¹ The intention of the mock search is to underscore the mystical experience of Nothing which can only be begun with what is simultaneously a return to the abandonment of the search. The narrator explains that: “the eyes suddenly start to search afresh as famished as the unthinkable first day until for no clear reason they as suddenly close again or the head falls” (212). The search, and the non-search, are represented here in the vanquished, who have literally become incurious seekers. The fact that they do not move suggests that their search mirrors, and yet is antithetical to, the search of the other lost bodies; unable to escape from their insatiable hunger to search, the other lost bodies search for nothing, which is repeatedly indicated by the *blanc* spaces that form throughout the narrative each time the narrator provides no clear objective to their search. For example, speaking of the chance meetings between man and wife, the narrator identifies that marital reunification is not the objective of the search, while at the same time leaving a *blanc* space as to what the objective is instead: “Whatever it is they are searching for it is not that” (213). The vanquished however, being able to perceive Nothing due to their mystical blindness, reveal that the search is more accurately for the mystical “timeless” Nothing that is the experience of the life of the mind. The search for Nothingness, once undertaken, is therefore always circular: it is the search for transcendence, a leaving of the macrocosm and a withdrawal into the microcosm which puts the entire cylinder world and the futility of desire, *sous rature*.

The desire for the erasure of life in the macrocosm in exchange for the mystical experience of the “timeless” Nothing in the mind produces some of the most dramatic action on the part of the searchers in the cylinder world. Indeed, it is no accident that the missing rungs have fallen into the hands of some searchers who attempt to attain a fleeting experience of escape from the macrocosm of the cylinder by hitting themselves over the head: “The missing rungs are in the hands of a happy few who use them mainly for attack and self-defence. Their solitary attempts to brain themselves culminate at the best in brief losses of consciousness” (203). The narrator’s language clearly reveals that the objective of the search is to move into the sphere of the mind, to obliterate the conscious self and to enter into the “timeless.” By striking the skull, the searcher can gain an experience of nothingness that undermines the representation of the outside world and puts the need to search *sous rature* that accompanies the mystical experience of Nothing. However, it is clear that “braining” themselves allows for only a fleeting loss of consciousness and an experience of the mystical Nothing which cannot be maintained.

By turning their vision inwards, the vanquished have ceased to exist physically within the cylinder world. Instead, they are the presence of an absence, an image of a positive nothing produced by the mystical transcendence of their physical surroundings. Identifying the representation of the vanquished as both (physically) present and (mentally) absent has serious consequences for the relationship between the narrator and his documentation of the cylinder world. In addition to the mystical blindness of the vanquished and the “devouring eyes” of the searchers, the third form of perception belongs to the narrator, whom Beckett identified in a letter as “une grand myopia.”²² The

term “myopia” comes from the Greek word *myôps* meaning “to shut the eye,” and is normally used to denote short-sightedness. Relying on this information, past critics have sought to demonstrate the ambiguities concerning the narrator’s documentation of the cylinder world. For example, in “Mis-takes, Mathematical and Otherwise,” Enoch Brater has described the effects of the narrator’s short-sightedness on the representation of the cylinder world. Amongst the number of glaring oversights, the narrator’s most notorious mistake concerns the number of lost bodies trapped in the “abode.” According to the narrator, there are two hundred lost bodies in the cylinder, a miscalculation which is clear from this passage:

But as to this moment of time and there will be no other numbering the faithful who endlessly come and go impatient of the last repose and those who every now and then stand still and the sedentary and the so-called vanquished may it suffice to say that at this moment of time to the nearest body in spite of the press and the gloom the first are twice as many as the second who are three times as many as the third who are four times as many as the fourth namely five vanquished in all. (213)

The population of the lost bodies according to the narrator’s calculations are $5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2$ which, by multiplying each of the former numbers by the next number in the sequence, equals five vanquished (5), twenty sedentary (5×4), sixty occasionally pausing ($5 \times 4 \times 3$), and one hundred and twenty lost bodies who are constantly moving ($5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2$). The problem, which has been reiterated by such critics as Ruby Cohn, Enoch Brater, and Susan Brienza, is that the number of lost bodies is two hundred and five ($5 + 20 + 60 + 120$) and not the two hundred that the narrator claims.²³ Simply put, the narrator is out by five, which is the number of the vanquished, whom the reader is told on two separate occasions are, “precisely to be counted on the fingers of one hand” (211) and more specifically that there are “namely five vanquished in all” (213).²⁴

While it is certainly true that the narrator makes “mis-takes” which Beckett obviously intended as part of the godgame of *The Lost Ones*, this computational “error” has been interpreted as an oversight on the part of the narrator. Identifying the vanquished in the cylinder and then leaving them out of the count when adding up the bodies is, at one level, simply part of the narrator’s own desire for “all round numbers” (204). However, at a second level, Beckett is also representing the relationship between the physical presence of the vanquished in the macrocosm and their escape from the cylinder into the microcosm of the mind. The vanquished, because they no longer perceive the cylinder as something, cannot be said to exist within something that for them is nothing. Therefore, having attained the “timeless” self in the mind through their mystical experience of Nothing, the vanquished have become a representation of the “timeless” self, which, because it is unknown, is also a-spatial. Further, the narrator does not refer to them as “the vanquished” which would impart to them an unambiguous presence, but as the “so-called vanquished,” which is intentionally suggestive of their paradoxical status.²⁵ As a result of physically being, yet mentally not being in the cylinder world, the vanquished embody the dichotomy of presence and absence, and as a result of the combination of these binary oppositions, are represented by the narrator as *sous rature* – as the something of nothing.

Interestingly, the term “mystic” is derived from the Latin *mysticus* and the Greek *mystikos*, and is the origin of the English term “mystery” which is identified as the trait of opening and closing of the eyes – the most overt characteristic of the vanquished.²⁶ Given

that the eyes of the vanquished are either “cast down or closed,” which “signif[ies] abandonment” and is “confined to the vanquished” (211), the equating of the vanquished with the term “mystery” reveals just how far Beckett intended to take the importance of the group of vanquished as the mystics of the cylinder world. However, this identification of the vanquished as symbolic of a “mystery” attains its greatest importance when the narrator states: “For in the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found and without nothing but mystery” (216).²⁷ While critics such as Enoch Brater and Peter Murphy have read this comment as ironic, noting that the myopic narrator “actually locates very few certainties for us,”²⁸ in fact, the narrator is clearly identifying the paradoxical status of the vanquished in this comment. In the first part of this excerpt, the narrator is stating that “certitudes” are present in the cylinder, which speaks directly to the certitude of the physical presence of the vanquished in the cylinder. The second half of this statement, “without nothing but mystery,” draws a direct correlation between the mystery of the world outside the cylinder, and the vanquished who are representative of the term “mystery” through their representation as mystics. Therefore, although the vanquished are certainly present in the cylinder, they have achieved escape by seeing the macrocosmic cylinder as “nothing” through their mystical attainment of Nothing. As such, the statement, “without nothing but mystery,” reveals that through their mystical experience, the vanquished, as images of a *blanc* nothing and “mystery,” have transcended the form of the cylinder by perceiving the cylinder as a form that is *sous rature* – something that is nothing.

For the searchers, the most important material possession in the cylinder are the fifteen ladders that “are propped against the wall without regard to harmony” (203). These ladders, as the narrator informs us, “are in great demand” because “the need to climb is too widespread. To feel it no longer is a rare deliverance” (203). The ladders allow a climber to gain access to his favorite “niche or alcove” (203), located half way up the cylinder wall. It is the narrator’s comment that to no longer feel the need to climb is “a rare deliverance” that deserves special consideration. According to the OED, “deliverance” means “release from restraint” or “to be set free.” To be released from the pull of the ladders is “rare” – indeed, it is only experienced by those who no longer feel the desire to climb. Therefore, it is significant that the climbing of the ladders, from which none of the searchers is immune, is only overcome by the even greater magnetism of the vanquished:

It goes without saying that only the vanquished hide their faces though not all without exception. Standing or sitting with head erect some content themselves with opening their eyes no more. It is of course forbidden to withhold the face or other part from the searcher who demands it and may without fear of resistance remove the hand from the flesh it hides or raise the lid to examine the eye. Some searchers there are who join the climbers with no thought of climbing and simply in order to inspect at close hand one or more among the vanquished or sedentary. (221-2)

Deliverance from the desire to search is only achievable through the vanquished. Interestingly, included in the etymology of the term “deliverance” is the term “delivery,” which signifies the movement towards the arrival at a particular destination. Because the ladders clearly lead to no particular destination, deliverance is only achieved through overcoming the need to climb, while the destination of the search which will involve deliverance from the futility of the desire to search, is the destination of the vanquished.²⁹

The searchers, in desisting from the desire to search will only forego the climb “in order to inspect at close hand one or more among the vanquished or sedentary.” Further the laws governing such inspections are clearly intended to reveal that the searchers are aware that the vanquished signify the means for escape: “The inspection once completed it is usual to put everything back in place as far as possible. It is enjoined by a certain ethics not to do unto others what coming from them might give offense. This precept is largely observed in the cylinder in so far as it does not jeopardize the quest which would clearly be a mockery if in case of doubt it were not possible to check certain details” (222).

Since the status of the five vanquished in the cylinder world of *The Lost Ones* is the presence of an absence, and therefore an image of nothing that reveals that escape from the cylinder world is through the mystical experience of the “timeless,” it is not surprising that the searchers are drawn most forcibly back to the “first vanquished woman” (221). According to the narrator’s calculations, she was the first to abandon the search, the first with the ability to see the cylinder as nothing, and therefore the first to transcend the borders of the cylinder by abandoning the search in the outside world for the microcosm of the mind. Having directed her gaze inwards, the vanquished woman, along with the other vanquished, has been freed from the insatiable appetite of desire. Keeping in mind Beckett’s dichotomous relationship between presence and absence which produces the “timeless” *blanc* nothingness of the mystical vanquished, the representation of the “first vanquished woman” clearly indicates that it is through her and

her mystical experience, that the escape from the cylinder world is to be achieved.

According to the narrator:

There does none the less exist a north in the guise of one of the vanquished or better still one of the women vanquished or better still the woman vanquished. She squats against the wall with her head between her knees and her legs in her arms. The left hand clasps the right shinbone and the right the left forearm. The red hair tarnished by the light hangs to the ground. It hides the face and whole front of the body down to the crutch. The left foot is crossed on the right. She is the north. She rather than some other among the vanquished because of her greater fixity. (221)

It is difficult for the searchers to have a certain knowledge of where they are in the cylinder. The cylinder, constructed of “rubber or suchlike” causes both the floor and ceiling to “bear no sign or mark apt to serve as a guide,” while the “feet of the ladders pitched always at the same points leave no trace” (221). And yet, while the cylinder does not provide any clues, it is the “vanquished woman” whom the searchers depend on as a “guide” to gain a sense of direction for the search in the cylinder world: “To one bent for once on taking his bearings she may be of help. For the climber averse to avoidable acrobatics a given niche may lie so many paces or metres to east or west of the woman vanquished” (221). Interestingly, with her head between her knees, the “woman vanquished” may be staring at her own navel, which is reminiscent of the “rare post-natal treat” in *Murphy* (1938) that is symbolic of “seeing nothing.”³⁰ Beckett’s representation of the “first vanquished woman” then, clearly indicates that it is through her that the escape from the cylinder world is to be achieved.

It is also significant that the vanquished woman is identified as North. In describing her as analogous to a point on a compass, Beckett is also defining her as a magnetic “guide”

that draws the other searchers to her. Further, in her Belacqua-like pose of abandonment with left hand clutching her shinbone and right hand grasping her forearm, – “the attitude,” which the narrator states, “wrung from Dante one of his rare wan smiles” (205) – she is represented as an “X,” which contributes to the idea of her being the position on a map which is the end goal of the search. She guides the searchers towards this metaphysical freedom that puts the cylinder *sous rature*, and re-represents it as an image of nothing. Since the intention of the search is to attain the mystical Nothing of the woman vanquished, the “X” is also meant to imply that her presence in the cylinder has been crossed out.³¹ Situated against the wall of the cylinder, the woman vanquished is represented *sous rature*, given presence and then crossed out (“X”) into an absence. Therefore, “the north woman,” like the other vanquished, is the presence of an absence in the cylinder world, the combination of which allows Beckett to represent her as an image of a *blanc* nothingness suggestive of the freedom that lies in the attainment of the “timeless” mystical experience.

While four of the vanquished “cleave to the wall,” there is “one in the arena of the stricken rigid in the midst of all the fevering. They recognize him and keep their distance” (211). Of all the difficulties and ambiguities in *The Lost Ones* it is the presence of this figure that is the most enigmatic and difficult to understand. Indeed, the fact that in the added fifteenth section that describes the final state of the lost bodies, the inclusion of the comment, “[t]he aged vanquished of the third zone has none about him now but others in his image motionless and bowed” (223), only increases the uncertainty surrounding this character. Indeed, it is interesting that the presence of this vanquished

figure in critical commentaries is conspicuous by his absence – there has been a complete avoidance of the strange position of this figure, and the reaction of the other searchers who apparently fear this being enough to totally avoid coming into contact with “him.” Given that the reader is offered no other details, this avoidance by both searchers and scholars alike is not entirely surprising. However, Beckett may have intended this uncertainty as the answer: this figure is only identifiable as a “mystery” which contributes further to the mystical vanquished in the cylinder world.

Throughout *The Lost Ones*, the narrator alludes repeatedly to the indeterminacy of time. The phrase, “In the beginning then unthinkable as the end” (212-3), puts the beginning and the end of the cylinder world *sous rature*. He speaks of the lost bodies roaming in the cylinder as occupying a “vast space of time impossible to measure until a first came to a standstill followed by a second and so on” (213), and the passage of time as, “a languishing happily unperceived because of its slowness” (209). Like the parallel between time and sand in *Endgame*, *Happy Days* and later in *Lessness*, Beckett has his narrator in *The Lost Ones* recall Eubulides of Miletus: “Even so a great heap of sand sheltered from the wind lessened by three grains every second year and every following increased by two if this notion is maintained” (212).³² An absolute absence is impossible – something will remain at the end that will give form to the nothingness. However, the most important image of time is the representation of the searchers in the bed of the cylinder which the narrator describes thus:

When weary of searching among the throng they may turn towards this zone it is only to skirt with measured tread its imaginary edge devouring with their eyes its occupants. Their slow round counter-carrier-wise creates a second even narrower belt respected in its turns by the main body

of searchers. Which suitably lit from above would give the impression at times of two narrow rings turning in opposite directions about the teeming precinct. (211)

The “counter-carrier-wise motion” of the searchers in the bed of the cylinder suggests that the passage of time is impossible to measure.³³ Because the searchers circle in opposite directions the clock-wise progression of time is put *sous rature* by the oppositional counter-clockwise motion. As in *Texts for Nothing*, time becomes “one enormous second,”³⁴ echoing the description of present time in Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* as being “without duration.”³⁵ Therefore, Beckett represents the image of the passage of time not in terms of a past and a future, but one that is an endless moment stretching out into an indistinguishable present time: “But as to at this moment of time and there will be no other” (213). The passage of time is a paradoxical force represented *sous rature*, as past and future cross each other out into nothingness. As a result, the metaphysical experience of the searchers is that of prisoners trapped in time; the four vanquished positioned along the edge of the cylinder exist outside of time – have therefore become “pure, will-less...timeless subject[s] of knowledge” – through their mystical experience of Nothing.³⁶

Therefore, throughout *The Lost Ones*, Beckett represents the vanquished as mystics in order to continue, through a different practice, his technique of writing *sous rature* in order to represent the “timeless” as nothingness. When Beckett first abandoned *The Lost Ones* in 1966, he instead compressed the narrative into the shorter text *Bing* (1966). Although the first drafts of *Bing* contained many of the same elements as found in the cylinder world, Beckett began to slowly put these forms *sous rature* in order to produce a

narrative altogether different from that of *The Lost Ones*. However, what he did include was the representation of writing *sous rature* in order to represent the *blanc* nothingness of the “timeless” self in *Bing* – a text that he described as “suitably brief and outrageous all whiteness and silence and finishedness.”³⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., "Introduction," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Endgame"* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 4.

² Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 246. All future references are to this edition.

³ According to James Knowlson, eight versions of *The Lost Ones* exist, which is suggestive of the difficulty that Beckett experienced with writing the text. *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 480. All future references are to this edition.

⁴ The allusion to "intractable complexities" is found in the reproduction of note written by Beckett located in Raymond Federman and John Fletcher eds., *Samuel Beckett: His Work and His Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 114.

⁵ Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), pp. 202-223. All future references are to this edition. Although begun in 1966 the fifteenth and final section of *Le Dépeupleur* not added until 1970, the same year as its publication. The translation into the English text *The Lost Ones*, was published two years later in 1972. Beckett got the idea for the French title from the end of the seventh and thirteenth stanzas of Lamartine's *Méditations Poétiques*: "Un seul être vous manque et tout est dépeuplé." It is also interesting to note that Beckett told Brian Finny, just prior to publishing *The Lost Ones* that he was undecided on whether to call the text "The Lost Ones," "Lost Ones," "The Lost" or to use "Missing" in exchange for "Lost" in each of the possible titles. Brian Finney, *Since How It Is: A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction* (London: Covent Garden Press Ltd., 1972), p. 8. All future references are to this edition.

⁶ Two suggestions are made by the narrator concerning the intentions of the lost bodies search. The first, is indicated in the opening line: "Abode where lost bodies search each searching for its lost one" (202). This appears to delineate the search either for "their lost one" or for a means of escape. Later in the text, the narrator expands on this idea of escape suggesting that since time immemorial "rumour has it or better still the notion is abroad that there exists a way out" (206). The two possible means of escape are either through a hub in the ceiling, or through one of the tunnels. Neither of these objectives can be proven by the narrator to actually be the intentions of the lost bodies behavior.

⁷ Brian Finney, *Since How It Is: A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction*, p. 11. According to Finney: "The lack of a solitary being in the uninhabited landscape of the poem that leaves Lamartine so indifferent to his physical surroundings is precisely the state to which everyone in the cylinder aspires (if they but knew it) and which is finally achieved after a fashion in the last section." Susan Brienza, identifies the vanquished represent "nonbeing." *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Studies in Metafiction* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1987), p. 141. All future references are to this edition.

⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldance and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), Volume I, p. 231. All future references are to this edition.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, "Fizzles 5" (Closed Space") in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 236.

¹⁰ See John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1976), pp. 110-131.

¹¹ Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Idea*, Volume I, p. 493.

¹² Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 157.

¹³ Sylvie Debevec Henning, *Beckett's Critical Complicity: Carnival, Contestation and Tradition* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), p. 171 According to Henning: "Only the nonsearchers [the vanquished], true sages in the classical-Christian sense, are really passive and dead, as it were, to the world. They are apparently will-less, having conquered all desire, including the desire to retaliate that occasionally afflicts even the sedentaries." Henning makes a significant error here in referring to the vanquished as sages; they do not speak nor outwardly manifest wisdom concerning their experience in and out of the cylinder world. In *Murphy*, for example, Neary is the object of derision because he pontificates wisdom (which is the identifying trademark of a sage) and yet is unable to carry out his own teachings by becoming enmeshed in the pursuit of the pleasures of the body. All future references are to this edition.

¹⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea*, Volume I, p. 493.

¹⁵ In the earliest drafts of *Bing*, which Beckett reduced from *The Lost Ones* just as he had with *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the first draft of the text contains most of the elements of *The Lost Ones* including the description of a single body resting "his" hands on a single ladder and leaning against a niche in the cylinder wall. By the tenth draft, nothing of these elements except for the body remain.

¹⁶ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 126-7.

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/ Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p. 64.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959), p. 44. All future references are to this edition.

¹⁹ Lawrence Harvey, in speaking of the ladder in *Watt* states, "Existence in the macrocosm is like existence on a ladder, a constant mounting and descending, an organized relation between one thing and another, between one step and another, a logical, practical, tiring business." Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*

(New Jersey: Princeton University Press Inc., 1970), p. 359. In *Watt* for example, Arsene at the top of the ladder finds himself at the bottom, "the reversed metamorphosis...the old thing where it always was, back again" p. 42-3.

²⁰ The construction of the ladders may be linked to this comment made by Fritz Mauthner: "I must destroy language within me, in front of me, and behind me step for step if I want to ascend in the critique of language, which is the most pressing task for thinking man; I must shatter each rung of the ladder by stepping upon it. He who wishes to follow me must reconstitute the rungs in order to shatter them once again." Quoted by Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," *PMLA* 95 (March 1980), p. 187.

²¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Volume III p. 161. Schopenhauer speaks here of the relationship between the "ablation of desire" and the experience of the mystic: "...if we turn our glance from our own needy and embarrassed condition to those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having attained to perfect self-knowledge, found itself again in all, and then freely denied itself, and then who merely wait to see the last trace of it vanish with the body it animates; then instead of the restless striving and effort, instead of the constant transition from wish to fruition, and from joy to sorrow, instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope which constitutes the life of the man who wills, we shall see that peace which is above all reason, that perfect calm of the spirit."

²² Like the "eye of prey" in *Imagination Dead Imagine* and the "lustrous eye" in *Ping*, Beckett referred to the narrator of *The Lost Ones*, as "une grand myopia" in the first manuscript of *Le Dépeupleur*. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, p. 475. This "thinking/speaking" eye seeks to make sense of the infinite complexities of the cylinder world, which inadvertently introduces the complexities that exist between perception and the "occasion" that is perceived. Indeed, the narrator's speech is riddled (like the cylinder with its "niches or alcoves") with self-reflexive acknowledgements of the ambiguity of its perception. For example, the repetition of the phrases, "at first sight," "on first impression," "if this notion is maintained," "this is not quite accurate," "so much roughly speaking for" and "seen from a certain angle," each indicate a degree of subjectivity in the narrator's perception and representation of the cylinder world that suggests that the re-appropriation of the world into vision and subsequently into the language of the text is never an "absolute" transition.

²³ See for example, Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 155.

²⁴ As Peter Murphy has demonstrated, the number five in the cylinder is extremely important: "There are twenty niches or alcoves and fifteen ladders. The temperature falls by a 'regular variation of five degrees per second.'" Peter Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 100. If there is a code to be broken in the cylinder, then it would appear that the five vanquished are a part of that code or an important link that might possible

hold the clue to the “intractable complexities” of the cylinder world. All future references are to this edition.

²⁵ According to Henning in *Beckett's Critical Complicity*, the absence of the vanquished from the count in the cylinder, “raises the question of whether the vanquished exist as anything except a kind of fiction” p. 178.

²⁶ Peter Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett*, p. 99.

²⁷ This allusion to the outside as “nothing but mystery” offers other possibilities that put the cylinder *sous rature*. The spatial beginning and end of everything that exists is in the cylinder world, the limits of which are firmly demarcated by the wall of the cylinder. However, by demarcating an edge, in this case the wall as an absolute limit, and that there is “nothing” without, the narrator is in fact describing a space that has no outside edge. And yet, something that does not have an other side or an outside cannot have an edge. Therefore, the limit of the cylinder can no longer be viewed as a static edge marking an inside from an outside, nor can the cylinder even be described as having a limit or an edge. The cylinder wall is the limit of nothing and is limited by nothing, and therefore without limits is a form that has been put *sous rature* – the presence of an absence that is nothing itself.

²⁸ Enoch Brater, “Mis-takes, Mathematical and Otherwise, in *The Lost Ones*” in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29, no.1 (Spring 1983), p. 97.

²⁹ Further, the term “deliverance” which is directly associated with the vanquished is also suggestive of Christian imagery, and especially given the fact that each of the four vanquished form an “X,” which can be seen as crosses along the wall. One is reminded of the narrator of *How It Is* who states, “crosses everywhere indelible traces.”

³⁰ The idea of nothingness and the staring at the navel, is also included in the French edition of *Endgame* in a section of text that was not included in Beckett's English translation. In the original French version, Clov spots the boy which leads to an important interrogation of what the child is doing. As it turns out, he is leaning against a wall. When Hamm demands further information concerning what the boy is looking at, Clov states: “I don't know what he is looking at. (*He raises the telescope. Pause. Lowers the telescope, turns to Hamm.*) His navel. Or thereabouts. (*Pause.*) Why this cross-examination?” Quoted in Martin Esslin, “Samuel Beckett: The Search for the Self,” *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1961), p. 36.

³¹ Dougald Macmillan makes a similar point in speaking of *Mime du reveur A*: “As Beckett's algebraic designation ‘X,’ as opposed to his usual ‘A’ for unnamed characters implies, the protagonist is an undetermined quantity.” Dougald Macmillan, “Human Reality and Dramatic Method: *Catastrophe*, *Not I* and the Unpublished Plays,” in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company* ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan Press Inc., 1987), p. 101.

³² Speaking of *Endgame*, Bair identifies that it is Eubulides to whom Hamm refers to as “that old Greek,” and not Zeno, as has often been argued. Here in *The Lost Ones*, the same misappropriation has occurred. Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 465.

³³ This description may owe something to a similar description made by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* which, of course, is also very concerned with the issues of time: “the machinery of my work is of a species unto itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, -- and at the same time...and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going.” Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 73/80-2.

³⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing* in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 106.

³⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books. 1969), p. 265.

³⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, Volume I, p. 231.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett in a letter to Jocelyn Herbert, 18 August 1966 Quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, p. 481.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Filling in the *Blanc* of Nothingness in *Ping*

The operation, which no longer belongs to the system of truth, does not manifest, produce or unveil any presence; nor does it constitute any conformity, resemblance, or adequation between a presence and a representation. And yet this operation is not a unified entity but the manifold play of a scene that, illustrating nothing – neither word nor deed – beyond itself, illustrates nothing. Nothing but the many-faceted multiplicity of a lustre which itself is nothing beyond its own fragmented light. Nothing but the idea which is nothing.¹

And this word man which is perhaps not the right one for the thing I see when I hear it, but an instant, an hour, and so on, how can they be represented...blank words, but I use them, they keep coming back, all those they showed me, all those I remember, I need them all, to be able to go on, it's a lie, a score would be plenty, tired and trusty, unforgettable, nicely varied, that would be palette enough...that's how it will end, in heart-rendering cries, inarticulate murmurs, to be invented...²

In the short prose text *Ping* (the 1966 English translation of the French text *Bing*), Beckett once again proves that he is a master at taking what should be a relatively simple situation and turning it into an almost impossibly complex conundrum. Written as an escape from the “intractable complexities” he encountered when writing *The Lost Ones*, *Bing/Ping* represents a return to a smaller spatial geometry similar to *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*. As in these two earlier works, the main premise is deceptively simple: put an unmoving, speechless, nameless being inside a tiny, seemingly stable rectangular enclosure, then describe them both. Describe them Beckett's narrator does, but the simple language he uses is so defamiliarizing in its series of combinations and repetitions – not to mention the jarringly distracting word “ping” that appears each time a semblance of sense begins to emerge – that the beginning and the end of the reading experience seem almost to mirror one another. And yet to state, as earlier critics

have done, that the language units and phrase sequences in *Ping* are an object lesson “in variations within repetitions,” does not provide any information concerning Beckett’s overall objective.³ Further, to state that *Ping* is “condensed,” “redundant” and “ambiguous,” and that it is therefore simply another of Beckett’s commentaries on the “difficulty of writing,” is to contribute to the critical reductionism that is the general malady of the majority of criticism of Beckett’s “trunk manuscripts.”⁴ However, if one seeks to move beyond mere textual mechanics and the autobiographical, and instead attempts to make sense of what Beckett is doing in the narrative, *Ping*, like *Lessness*, becomes highly compelling. In *Ping*, Beckett undertakes to subvert the art of mimetic representation through the image of the little body imprisoned in its rectangular enclosure. Every attempt to represent results in the ongoing series of disappearances into the “whiteness,” until the reader is finally left with a blank canvas – a narrative written *sous rature* – and Beckett’s representation of nothingness.

The emphasis on the impossibility of mimetic representation in *Ping* traces a path that leads directly to Beckett’s ideas concerning representational art, and moreover, “the grotesque fallacy of realistic art”⁵; that is, the fallacy that it reveals anything of importance concerning what Schopenhauer calls the “timeless” self and world.⁶ In his *Three Dialogues* with George Duthuit, Beckett comments that it is “not that [modern painters have] surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a mere means like any other, but that they [have] never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it.”⁷ When asked what he would prefer, Beckett’s reply is

worth citing once again, as it is perhaps more relevant to the art of *Ping* than any other example of the “residua” prose texts:

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.⁸

Beckett’s position is that modern art essentially polishes its wares on the nothing new, offering little more than a series of different repetitions of traditional “occasions.” The logical alternative that Beckett offers is the unstable relationship between perceiver and perceived, or self and world. Each constitutes an all-important arena of the unknown which not only problematizes the autonomy of representation, but serves as the new metaphysical matrix of artistic expression. And yet, it is also clear that Beckett is stressing the inability of the artist to represent – through representational forms like language – the “timeless” self and world. To represent being and world in art, in other words, is always to represent the impossibility of representing the “timeless” a-spatial and a-temporal “thing in itself.” Therefore, “nothing,” in the phrase “nothing to express” is the active subject and, by extension, object of artistic expression. It constitutes giving form to this absence of knowledge, to actively centering representation on the cusp of the known as it is disappearing into the unknown. Throughout *Ping*, Beckett seeks to represent this failure of language to represent the “timeless” through his own technique of writing *sous rature* – representing and then crossing that representation out. Moreover, it is through this act of writing *sous rature* that Beckett is able not only to reveal the impossibility of representing the “timeless” in language, but to represent the “timeless” as “nothing” that is both the failure and the obligation of representation.

That Beckett is interested in artistically representing the failure of language as the means for representing the “timeless” as “nothing” is indicated in the final manuscript of the original French text, *Bing*. While the first fifteen manuscripts of *Bing* contain no title, the significance of the fact that the sixteenth and final draft contains the crossed out title *Blanc* (with *Bing* written in beside it) has been left unconsidered in relation to the “timeless.”⁹ Beckett’s writing out the word/title “Blanc” and then crossing it out is a clear instance of both his approach to writing language *sous rature*, and his desire to give artistic expression to the “timeless” as a *blanc* nothingness throughout the entire narrative. At one level, the word “Blanc” is crossed out because the word itself is inaccurate, representing, as it were, a “failure to express.” And yet, the word “Blanc” is also clearly necessary, so it remains legible just below the surface of the crossing out process of erasure. Therefore, the word “Blanc” is present, in that Beckett left it in and it can be read, but it also clearly fails to express, and therefore is meant to be absent and read *sous rature* through crossing the term out.

While the act of writing the term “Blanc,” and then crossing the term out indicates the process of erasure that is undertaken throughout *Ping*, Beckett’s choice of the word “Blanc” also speaks directly to the expression of the “timeless” as something that can only be represented – because it exists outside of language – as a *blanc* space signifying nothing. “Blanc” is present and has meaning because it is inscribed on the page in order to denote the presence of white; and yet the term also simultaneously signifies “no meaning” or a *blanc* “invisible” space – a *blanc* term on a *blanc* page that puts the word

itself *sous rature*, and produces an absence of signification that expresses a failure to express anything other than its own failure to express.¹⁰ Derrida writes that,

the sign “blanc” (“white,” “blank,” “space”), with all that is associated with it from one thing to the next, is a huge reservoir of meaning... And yet, the white mark also marks, through the indeterminacy of the white page, the place of the writing of these “whites”; and first of all the spacing between the different significations, *the space of reading*. The white of the spacing has no determinable meaning, it folds up the text towards itself, and at each moment points out the place (where “nothing will have taken place except the place”), the condition, the labor, the rhythm. As the page folds in upon itself, one will never be able to decide if white signifies something, or signifies only, or in addition, the space of writing itself.¹¹

The *blanc* of whiteness has no determinable meaning, and yet it signifies the “something” that is the failure to signify – the presence to what is an absence of any “absolute” determination of meaning. Similarly, the representation of the being and the rectangular enclosure in *Ping* is constantly represented and then put *sous rature* in order for Beckett to express the *blanc* nothingness of the “timeless” self and world *as something*. The only way, in other words, in which the different representations of the “timeless” as nothing can be expressed in the text, is by first giving each form presence (as one might in a mimetic reproduction), and then subsequently crossing each representation out in order to include in that form an indeterminable absence – the representation of the presence of the *blanc* nothing that serves as Beckett’s metaphor for the “timeless” self and world.¹² In other words, because Beckett recognizes that the “timeless” “thing in itself” is both a-temporal and a-spatial, it cannot be represented through language; therefore, “the [timeless] thing is impossible,” it can only be represented by putting language *sous rature* – representing and crossing language out to produce the *blanc* space – which in turn gives the “timeless” presence as the *blanc* space of nothing within the object of signification.¹³

Interestingly, when Beckett came to translate the French text *Bing*, the most significant change that he made was putting the French title *sous rature* and substituting the title *Ping* in its place. The importance of this change has led critics, such as Leslie Hill, to speculate that the change of title is little more than Beckett alleviating the need to “devise a totally different onomatopoeia for the English text.”¹⁴ Another possibility, however, is that the substitution of the English title *Ping* derives from Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the novel Beckett discusses at length in his 1931 monograph *Proust*. In the passage in question, the narrator, Marcel, says of the Polish artist and musician, Ski, that,

[he] would *paint* anything you asked, on cuff-links or on lintels. He sang like a professional and played from *memory*, giving the piano the effect of an orchestra, less by his virtuosity than by his vamped basses which suggested the inability of the fingers to indicate that at a certain point the cornet entered, which in any case he would *imitate* with his lips. Searching for words when he spoke so as to convey an interesting *impression*, just as he would pause before banging out a cord with the exclamation “*Ping!*”¹⁵ (italics mine)

Since Beckett is undertaking a new direction in representing being and the world as the subject matter of his text, the title *Ping*, when considered in relation to its Proustian context, contributes an active component to the overall design of the narrative.¹⁶ Here it is the italicized words preceding the term “*Ping!*” that provide the most direct indication of the direction that Beckett undertakes in this work, and provides further correlation to Beckett’s views concerning the representation of the “timeless” as “nothing” in the *Three Dialogues*. For example, the fact that Ski “would paint anything” initially draws the reader’s attention to the importance of representational art. Moreover, the words

“imitate,” “impression” and “memory” suggest that *Ping* is concerned with questioning the main assumption of a stable and unified relation between subject and object that underlies the project of mimetic art. The title *Ping*, therefore, is not simply a nonsense word; it contributes the same contextual focus upon the need to transcend the appearance of mimetic “absolutes” by exposing the presence of the absent nothing of the “timeless” self and world.

In order to represent both the presence and the absence that are needed to produce an image of the “timeless” nothing of the world, the spatial geometry of the rectangular enclosure in *Ping* is constructed by way of a series of different repetitions, each of which give its form presence, while subsequently crossing it out to produce absence and the ensuing image of the *blanc* “timeless” as nothing. The white walls of the rectangular enclosure are each inscribed with “traces” of a “grey” mass that together “blur [the] signs” into “no meaning,” revealing that while the spatial geometry of the rectangular enclosure has presence, it is also infused with absence, the combination of which produces the *blanc* nothing of the “timeless” that Beckett is seeking to express.¹⁷ For example, the “white floor one square yard” is “never seen,” while the “white ceiling shining one yard [is also] never seen.” The “white walls each its trace grey blur sign no meaning” are “almost white,” and though “all [of this is] known,” these “all white planes meeting” are “invisible” and have “no meaning.” Therefore the walls, the floor, and the ceiling are “all known” “within without” giving the rectangular enclosure presence, and yet Beckett puts the entire image *sous rature*, in that the “timeless” “thing in itself” of the enclosure is “never seen” – it is the “invisible” *blanc* space with “no meaning.” “White,”

the narrator in *From an Abandoned Work* says, “has always affected me strongly”; the effect in *Ping*, is that while the spatial geometry of the rectangular enclosure is created, it is subsequently put *sous rature*, the act of which reveals the inability of the language to signify the “timeless,” and at the same time, giving it a representational form beyond signification through the succeeding representation of the *blanc* space of nothing.

While Beckett is stressing throughout *Ping* that there “is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication” concerning the “timeless,” the relationship between the presence of the form and the way in which it is subsequently made into an absence allows Beckett to reveal that any object involved in a transference from signified to signifier is always a relationship that stresses a non-relation.¹⁸ The rectangular enclosure in *Ping* “is,” in that it is given form and is present, and “is not,” in that it is always “other” in relation to what it was at any past moment (or even following “one second”) of representation. In part, the ongoing changes to the object that occur in time are further problematized by the fact that the artist cannot represent the object in its totality all at once; the object, like successive frames in a film, must be experienced and represented successively through perception, and further translated successively into and through language. As Beckett states in *Proust*:

So that whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable. At the best, all that is realized in Time (all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations – and never integrally and at once.

One can never see the object nor represent the object all at once; to represent all perspectives simultaneously, as Leibniz has argued, is a perspectiveless position. Not

only is the object experienced and represented “successively,” it is also necessarily non-logical, different from “one second” to the next, awarding the artist only “one second with image” before it disappears and becomes other. Indeed, this explains why the word “is” never appears in the narrative. The “is,” or “absolute” presence of the being and enclosure can never be captured since they are always in a process of change, and therefore can only be represented “successively.” Indeed, not only is the perspective of the artist in relation to the object always problematical, the object of representation is itself equally so, producing the non-relational of the object in relation to itself, and never an integrated stable “thing in itself.” Thus, by representing the enclosure *sous rature*, Beckett not only incorporates the “never seen” “timeless” “thing in itself” as a *blanc* nothing, but each time the “white planes meeting” suggest a completion of the form, he also stresses that the enclosure is “nothing” in relation to what it was “one second” after it attained form, and as a result the “thing in itself” is always “invisible” to perception.

Therefore, while Beckett is clearly intending to draw attention to the impossibility of representing a “timeless” object mimetically in *Ping*, he is also working with the relation of the object to itself as it is represented within a mimetic framework. Due to the changing nature of the object, mimesis, while seeking a direct transference, actually expresses nothing other than the difference between the signifier and the “thing in itself” that has been signified. As a result, it is no longer possible to argue, as past critics have, that the world of *Ping* is static. Instead, Beckett merges the representation of the “invisible” “timeless” together with the flux of the object to create a doubling of the *blanc* space – a *blanc* on *blanc* – which ironically produces a more successful space of

mimetic representation of the object – a representation, in other words, of the failure to represent that takes into account the changing form of the enclosure through writing the image *sous rature*. Further, it is the resulting disappearance and the production of the *blanc* spaces that allow Beckett to “admit the chaos.” The definition of chaos provided by Gilles Deleuze is once again appropriate to Beckett’s intentions in *Ping*:

Chaos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is void that is not a nothingness but a virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence. Chaos is an infinite speed of birth and disappearance.¹⁹

Therefore, it is not simply the shape of the rectangular enclosure that should signal Beckett’s conflation of womb and tomb (as already represented in the cube/rotunda of *All Strange Away* and in the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine*); rather, it is the chaotic relation of the enclosure to itself which represents that the object of representation has died many times on the way to being represented. Therefore, the ongoing representation and disappearance of the rectangular enclosure is necessarily a continuous process of birth and death, as it attains form and then loses all dimensions, “[p]lanes meeting invisible one only shining white infinite but that known not,” to become a *blanc* space of nothing, “[w]hite planes no trace shining white one only shining white infinite but that not known.” The only way that language can capture either the “timeless” “thing in itself” or the object as it exists at any given moment of time, is to represent through *sous rature* – to write the image as it is, and then cross the image out in order to incorporate the *blanc* “timeless,” the combination of these acts which makes the art of representation in *Ping*, an art of failure.

While Beckett represents the rectangular enclosure as both presence and absence in order to realize the flux of the image and the “timeless” as nothing, he also constructs the spatial geometry of the narrative itself in order to represent the same effect. While *Ping* is one of the “residua” texts exiled by Beckett outside the main body of his other works, many “traces blurs signs no meaning,” from these other works, paradoxically, exist as “residua” within *Ping*.²⁰ Indeed, Susan Brienza, for example, states that “[i]mages as well as phrases here are so condensed and allusive that the reader can interpret them *only* through the matrix of Beckett’s previous works, making *Ping* a prime case of intertextuality.”²¹ Considered spatially, the reader will recognize the entrapment of Murphy in his “cage,” and Hamm in his chair (to name just two examples) as similar to the “fixed” being in *Ping*. Traces of *Imagination Dead Imagine* with its white rotunda on an infinite white ground and the ongoing process of representing that form *sous rature* “no way in, go in, measure” is also similar to the “diabolical complexity” of the spatial geometry in *Ping*. The dream of the trapdoor in the cylinder of *The Lost Ones* is repeated in the allusion in *Ping* to the possibility of a “way out” through the ceiling. Temporally, the allusions to “buried under seconds” in *The Unnamable*, and “a few seconds” in *How It Is* have been reduced to “one second” in *Ping*, while the lighting, and what Hugh Kenner calls the “over-exposure” in *Ping*, can also be linked to all the other “residua” texts, as well as to Beckett’s interest in cinematography and his work on *Film*.²² Indeed, once the reader begins to trace all the allusions and borrowings from Beckett’s other work in *Ping*, the layers of intertextuality in the text are seemingly endless.

Therefore, by producing a text that is full of “traces blurs signs” from other sources, Beckett creates a new narrative; and yet, if one were to extract these sources from the narrative, in order to simply represent *Ping* itself, the text would in a sense be absent – the production of the *blanc* “thing in itself.” In fact, “intertextuality” not only forces the reader to find echoes from other texts in *Ping*, but of equal importance, to question the very construction of these other texts. The process involves an infinite regression as well as a contraction, in that every text is made up of “traces” from other texts (a position which is consistent with Beckett’s own views on his work). As such, the “allusiveness” of “phrases” and “images” that Brienza speaks of actually echoes the narrator’s allusions to the fact that “Ping [is] fixed elsewhere,” but that this elsewhere is “not known,” since the object of representation is never static but something that is always in flux – has “no” determinable “meaning.” To begin to strip away from *Ping* what we know to exist in other forms in other texts, would signify a confrontation with “the ideal core of the onion” that lies at the centre of this narrative – the presence, in other words, of a *blanc*, “timeless,” “thing in itself” beyond signification.²³

While the nature of the narrative involves the reader in a regression back through Beckett’s previous texts, in *The Lost Ones*, the only hint of nature is either through one of the tunnels that leads “to nature’s sanctuaries,” or through the “dream of the trapdoor” in the hub of the ceiling that would give way to the “sun and other stars.”²⁴ In *Imagination Dead Imagine*, nature is created, and therefore represented, only to be put *sous rature* in what John Pilling refers to as the narrative’s “prologue”: “Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit.”²⁵ As we have seen, this passage recalls the

creation of the world found in the book of *Genesis*, and yet all is omitted or put *sous rature* as soon as it is given presence in order to produce a *blanc* space of the “timeless” nothing that “in the beginning” was never given form through the “Word.” As such, this act involves Beckett’s dialectical reversal of the hierarchical relationship which subordinates absence to presence; by giving absence preference over an “absolute” mimetic presence, the absence of these natural elements become images of the unknown and as such, by being virtually erased from the page, images of nothing.

In *Ping*, the representation of nature is considered in order to undermine the notion that mimetic art can represent the “timeless” complexities of the outside world “absolutely.” Since the nature of the enclosure and the little being are images of the presence of an absence which together produce the *blanc* “timeless” as nothing, the inclusion of the natural image of “the wind,” signifies a similar concern. While the wind has presence, it remains, in essence, a natural phenomenon that is unknown and absent – it can only be perceived in relation to the force that it exerts upon other objects. In *Texts for Nothing* for example, the narrator, speaking of the voice says, a “trace, it wants to leave a trace, yes, like air leaves among the leaves, among the grass, among the sand.”²⁶ The presence of the air is determinable only as an absent thing that has traced (and left traces of) its presence on other objects. In *Ping*, the term “wind” literally signifies nothing – the presence of an absence of words to identify the “timeless,” the words being carried away by the wind (as they are in *Watt*) before they can be made to signify in any “absolute” sense the “thing in itself.”²⁷ Similar to the candles in the cube/rotunda of *All Strange Away*, the allusion to “the wind” in *Ping* also recalls a famous passage from Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry,”

which identifies the creating mind as that which is subject to “an inconsistent wind” that is beyond the control of the artist:

... the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconsistent wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises form within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.²⁸

Shelley’s metaphor of the creative mind being akin to a coal that is of a “transitory brightness” due to the flux of the wind of inspiration, provides a direct correlation to Beckett’s views concerning representational art, and the non-relation between subject and object. The object of representation always contains within it the secret dimension of the individual’s “timeless” subjectivity. Therefore, even the most mimetic of representations are subjectively influenced by “the indirect and comparative expression of indirect and comparative perception.”²⁹ Further, the fact that creative inspiration is never a constant sustainable force but the source of the unknown that can come and go, also contributes to the unknown of both the subject and the object. In other words, because inspiration and “inspired perception” are not constant and unknowable, and because the “timeless” subjectivity of the subject which represents the world is equally unknowable, it is this very experience of these unknowns that Beckett constitutes as the most important aspects of artistic representation.

In *Ping*, Beckett draws on the representation of the bodies in *Imagination Dead Imagine* who are all “white on white,” causing the “figure” of the bodies to be present in the rotunda, while at the same time absent, disappearing into the “ground.” Through the play between presence and absence, the body, like the enclosure around it, becomes an image

of a *blanc* nothingness: the being is present, in that it represents the translucent body of a fetus and therefore is symbolic of birth, while it is also absent as an image of death – virtually crossed out – disappearing along with the rectangular enclosure, into the nothingness of the “white on white.” The narrator states: “Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle.” The bare white body is “fixed,” while the ambiguity associated with the “[h]ands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle” is Beckett’s means of combining the body as an image of both birth and death.³⁰ While this body is given form and by extension presence, it is also denied form, in that as an image of death and absence it is virtually crossed out by Beckett in order to produce the representation of nothingness. The body, in other words, as soon as it is given form, disappears into the void produced by the nothingness of the rectangular enclosure.

Having delineated the image of the body in terms of its position and place in the white microcosmic enclosure, Beckett also crosses the body out to make it absent due to the failure to represent the “timeless” self in language through explicit examples of writing *sous rature*. From the “[b]are white body fixed white on white invisible,” it is evident that the body is present in the first half of the “sentence,” but that in the second half, the canceling effect of “white on white” causes the body to be crossed out, made absent and consequently “invisible.” Thus, each time the body appears it is put *sous rature* by the time it has been represented by the language: the “[w]hite feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle” of the “bare white body fixed one yard” are “invisible.” The

“mouth” of the Being is a “white seam like sewn” and is also “invisible.” The “Nose ears white holes mouth white seam like sewn invisible.” The body, and its parts are present, as an object that has figure and spatial properties because it is “white,” and then is made virtually absent, as “white on white” produces the *blanc* of all ground and the representation of nothingness as a metaphor for, and the impossibility of, representing the “timeless.”

Interestingly, the eyes of the being in *Ping* are not just blue, as in *The Lost Ones* with the “blue eyes for preference,” but “light blue,” which serves to suggest the nothingness of the body, or “figure,” on what is an infinite white “ground.”³¹ With the inclusion of the “light,” the eyes are subject to the same underlying invisibility as the enclosure and the body itself; their blue colouring gives them presence, while the light invokes a sense of absence and an underlying invisibility only just obscured below their surface. Indeed, over the course of the narrative, this underlying absence – which is identified by the term “light” – causes the eyes to undergo a gradual disappearance, as they transform from light into the white/*blanc* of nothingness. This is clear from the examples, “Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just,” and “Only the eyes only just light blue almost white,” “Eyes alone uncover given blue light blue almost white,” “Only the eyes given blue light blue almost white fixed front only colour alone uncover.” The eyes are present in that they are “uncover,” and yet the sentences that follow continue to allude to the fact that these eyes are “almost white,” causing them (and any traces of the body) to disappear into the void of the underlying *blanc* nothingness. Further, in the final image, the disappearance of the eyes actually occurs, “eyes holes light blue almost white last colour ping white

over.” As James Knowlson notes when speaking of Beckett’s theatre, the “opening and closing the eyes are seen then not merely as physical movements...but as responses to the experience of physical reality.”³² The physical reality of the world of the enclosure is present in the representation of the eyes, which become an image of the absence, as they transform from the presence of “light blue almost white,” into the nothingness of “white” and finally “over.”

The “light blue eyes” of the being, however, are not the only colour that appears in the narrative. *Ping* also contains the colours “grey,” “black,” and “rose.” While each threatens to produce an “absolute” presence to the enclosure, “each of these colours,” as Vivian Mercier and later Susan Brienza point out, “is reducible to white” – the white light that is the totality of the spectrum.³³ Therefore, these colours produce the necessary representational presence, while the fact that they are ultimately white suggests an underlying absence. Most importantly, beneath these colours that together serve as the artist’s means for representing the world, is the underlying whiteness – the *blanc* nothingness of the “timeless” – that is only further obscured with each attempt to fill the canvas with the colours of representational forms.³⁴

Of these colours, it is “rose” that holds the greatest interest, in that it immediately conjures up “Malebranche less the rosy hue,” a comment made by the “voice in me not mine” in *How It Is*.³⁵ “Less the rosy hue” speaks to the fact that Beckett could not accept Malebranche’s notion that God’s position is outside of the word, and subsequently that the world and being are at fault for their dilapidated condition. In *Ping*, the colour “rose”

introduces chaos into the apparently stable forms of the enclosure and the body, reminding us that the microcosmic enclosure is of a “rosy hue,” a colour Beckett associates with belief in an ordering Christian God. Where the book of *Genesis* records that “in the beginning” God gave form to the earth that was all void, in *Ping*, Beckett represents the opposite, suggesting that God is guilty of trapping the body in the purgatorial cycle of its inability to represent the “thing in itself” in any certain terms. As Beckett says elsewhere, “if there were only darkness all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable.”³⁶ In *Ping*, the darkness of language and the representation of the forms all lead to *blanc*, which causes the presence of being and enclosure to contain within them the *blanc* spaces of metaphysical uncertainties that continue to resist some form of signification other than nothing.

The suffering of being produced through the inability to attain an “absolute” form due to the impossibility of representing the “timeless” self and by extension the inability to capture being mimetically within the frame of the rectangular enclosure, is used by Beckett as a metaphor for the conflation of its body with the crucifixion and the resurrection of the body of Christ.³⁷ The narrator states: “Given rose only just nails fallen white over. Long hair invisible white over. White scars invisible same white as flesh torn of old given rose only just.” In this passage, the “nails,” like those used to secure the body to the crucifix, the “long hair,” the “scars,” and the “flesh torn,” are all intended as a metaphor for Christ on the cross, while the term “rose” is inextricably linked to the tomb of the enclosure and Christ’s resurrection.³⁸ The being, then, suspended in the

microcosmic womb-tomb and signifying the endless suffering of all beings, is the eternal Christ, trapped in the perpetual cycle of achieving meaning and presence through being represented in language, while subsequently being crossed out (pun intended) as something that cannot ultimately be signified. Like the changing form of the enclosure that is always other in relation to itself from one moment to the next, the being in *Ping* exists simultaneously within both of these extremes; moreover, each of these extremes cancels the other out, producing the image of being as a *blanc* space that is, in relation to the “timeless,” always outside the limits of signification.

Given that “there is,” in the words of Hamm in *Endgame*, “no lack of void,” and that God left His only begotten son to perish under such circumstances, the alleviation of human suffering by a benevolent God seems highly improbable. Suspended, as if by invisible strings in the rectangular enclosure, the being appears to be, like Vladimir and Estragon, simply “waiting.” Because God is “a witness that cannot be sworn,” and therefore is *in absentia*, the being in *Ping* symbolizes a puppet on a string, suspended within the rectangular enclosure.³⁹ In speaking of the interest that Beckett had in the puppet theatre, James Knowlson and John Pilling in *Frescoes of the Skull* cite this quotation from Robert Helbing:

Symbolically, marionettes represent beings of innocent, pristine nature. They are members of only one world responding “naturally” and “gracefully” to divine guidance. This is underscored by their apparent weightlessness... They represent a state of grace, a “paradise lost” to man, whose conscious and wilful “free” self assertions make him self conscious.⁴⁰

Beckett's vision here in *Ping*, as it was in *All Strange Away*, is altogether darker. Because the being in *Ping* is represented as puppet-like, Beckett once again brings together the notion of mimesis, presence and absence, and the "timeless" "thing in itself" of being as an image of nothingness. Beckett once stated that "Being has a form...it is a form that has been abandoned, left behind, a proxy in its place."⁴¹ By "proxy," Beckett means that being is the metaphysical dichotomy of presence and absence; the puppet stands in the place of being, and is being, representing both presence and absence. Suspended, the being in *Ping* certainly lacks free will, and is in a puppet-like limbo that serves as a mimetic proxy in place of being. The image of the being as a puppet, in other words, brings together the presence of being along with the absence of the puppet as a mimetic representation for being, and, conversely, the presence of the puppet with the absence of a real being. Indeed, Schopenhauer's comment that the world is "a puppet show worked by wires" is thoroughly represented in *Ping*.⁴²

The being in *Ping* is therefore not so much imprisoned by spatial constraints – since all spatial representations cannot be known and therefore are nothing – but more by the simultaneous presence and absence of the body – the unknown "timeless" *blanc* nothing from which there is no escape because there is no means of signifying its existence through language. Beckett's representation of metaphysical, as opposed to spatial imprisonment, is furthered by the choice of the title *Bing* for the original French text and the inclusion of the terms "hop" and "bing" in that narrative. The experience of being "fixed ping fixed elsewhere" is "fixe hop fixe ailleurs" – "hop," of course, signifying movement and change.⁴³ According to John Pilling, "a clear distinction between ["bing"

and “hop”] was intended; “bing” indicates a mental movement and “hop” a physical one.”⁴⁴ However, it is also clear that Beckett intended the term “bing” to be understood in another sense, for “bing,” or “le bing,” which has previously been understood to be little more than a nonsense word, is in French slang the term for “prison,”⁴⁵ and as such suggests the oppositional force of stasis. Therefore, while the title *Ping* reveals that the object of representation is always in a constant process of change, the title *Bing* identifies that being is trapped within itself due to the inability to be represented meaningfully through representational art, and further that to be represented mimetically as a static object is always to represent a failure to represent the “thing in itself” that is the a-spatial and a-temporal “timeless” self.

Given the fact that “ping [is] not alone,” the notion that this being is watched over in this metaphysical imprisonment is realized by the description of a perceiving eye ominously observing the little body. Indeed, this eye suggests any number of possible explanations: it may be, like in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the “eye of prey,” searching in the void for any sign of life, or possibly even the “myopic eye” that problematically records the behavior of the lost bodies and the shape of the cylinder in *The Lost Ones*. Further, it may be, as Ruby Cohn suggests, the eye of the narrator, or even the eye of the reader;⁴⁶ it may be the inescapable and unattainable subject of desire, the suffering of being perceived, and conversely the need to be seen in order to be. While the “nature” of this eye is shrouded in “mystery,” avoiding, as it has, an “absolute” characterization, the two central descriptions of this roving eye do once again denote the metaphysical relationship of the little being as an image of the presence of an absence, that together produce the

“timeless” as a *blanc* nothing that exists beyond the limits of representation. The narrator states:

Ping elsewhere always there but that known not. Ping perhaps not alone
one second with image same time a little less dim eye black and white half
closed long lashes imploring that such memory almost never. (195)

And later, in the concluding sentence of *Ping*:

Head haught eyes white fixed front old ping last murmur one second
perhaps not alone eye unlustrous black and white half closed long lashes
imploring ping silence ping over. (196)

The eye is described as “dim,” “black and white half closed long lashes imploring.”⁴⁷ At one level, this description can be read as the mind’s eye of the being observing its own memories. Memory, whether “voluntary” or “involuntary,” is the mimesis of the mind which re-represents the experience of the external world internally. However in *Ping*, memory is a form of mimesis that is also put *sous rature* throughout the text with the repetition of, “that much memory almost never,” and “that much memory henceforth never.” More important, the eye is both “black and white” which suggests that it is observing exactly what the reader has seen in terms of “the traces” of the black writing and the white *blanc* spaces that together form a blurred representation of being that can only ultimately sign “no meaning.” Further, the eye is “imploring” the being with its “long lashes,” while the term “unlustrous” not only suggests dullness, but allusively contains the word “lust.”⁴⁸ If the eye represents the mind’s eye of the being, then the eye is desiring a positive representational presence; and yet, what it sees instead is the blackness of itself (represented in language) disappearing into the *blanc* nothingness – the

failure to represent any knowledge of the “timeless” self – the failure “ping over” of words, and the final representation, or return to, the *blanc* page.

Through undermining the production of mimetic art in *Ping*, Beckett seeks to represent the image of the “timeless” as a *blanc* space of nothing – something that is essentially (in relation to the “essential” self) beyond signification. As a result, in *Ping*, the reader is made witness to the fact that, “Nothing is more real than nothing,” as every form in the narrative is virtually crossed-out as soon as it attains presence, until the final word in the narrative is “over” – and a *blanc* space inscribed with language and the images it contains is crossed out to signify the failure of language and a return to the “Blanc” that Beckett considered originally for the text’s title. In the apocalyptic vision of *Lessness*, the narrative that he stated proceeded directly from *Ping*, Beckett will overtly dismiss the notion of an ordering Christian God, allowing his tiny “refugee” to seek shelter in the chaos, to put the walls of belief and the illusion of order *sous rature* and seek “refuge” in the scattered world and words that remain.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jacques Derrida, "The First Session," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 159.
- 2 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/ Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1991), p. 169-70. All future references are to this edition.
- 3 J.E. Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 114.
- 4 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 160. All future references are to this edition.
- 5 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931), p. 57. All future references are to this edition.
- 6 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), p. 213. All future references are to this edition.
- 7 Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 139. All future references are to this edition.
- 8 *Three Dialogues*, p. 139.
- 9 Richard L. Admussen, *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: A Study* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), pp. 21-24.
- 10 This idea of representing and then putting *sous rature* finds a parallel in the image of the rotunda in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. As noted in the earlier chapter, the rotunda is "white" and therefore is present in that it has form and can be seen, and yet it is absent in that it is "white on white," which makes it invisible. The image of the rotunda in *Imagination Dead Imagine* then, is another "species" of representing the "Blanc" through *sous rature* that Beckett is undertaking here again in *Ping*.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, "Mallarmé," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 115-6. All future references are to this edition.
- 12 For Derrida, mimesis "is always the logic of *semblance*, articulated around the division between appearance and reality, presence and absence, the same and the other, or identity and difference. This is the division that grounds (and that constantly unsteadies) mimesis. At whatever level one takes it – in the copy or the reproduction, the art of the actor, mimetism, disguise, dialogic writing – the rule is always the same: the more it resembles, the more it differs. The same, in its sameness, is the other itself." "Mallarmé," p. 116.

¹³ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, p. 139.

¹⁴ Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 179.

¹⁵ Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), II, p. 873. Attention to this passage was kindly provided in discussion by James Acheson.

¹⁶ It should also be noted that the term "ping" surfaces twice in Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* where Belacqua argues his position concerning what makes a work of fiction successful: "someone who could always be relied on for just the one little squawk, ping!, just right, the right squawk in the right place...only one, tuning-fork charlatan to move among the notes and size 'em up and steady 'em down and chain 'em together in some kind of a nice little cantilena." Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), p. 112. And again with, "But they [the books characters] will let us down, they will insist on being themselves, as soon as they are called for a little strenuous collaboration. Ping! they will no doubt cry with a sneer, pure permanent luis, we? We take leave to doubt that." Quoted in Eyal Amiran, *Wandering and Home: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), p. 173 no. 12.

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Ping*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), pp. 193-6. Due to the high degree of repetition of phrases in this text, the process of providing page numbers is futile. Instead, I have only indicated page numbers when a significant passage as been quoted.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 67.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 124.

²⁰ For example, Derrida states that there are "an infinite number of booklets enclosing and fitting inside other booklets, which are only able to issue forth by grafting, sampling, quotations, epigraphs, references, etc. Literature voids itself in its limitlessness." In "The First Session," *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 177.

²¹ Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction*, p. 161.

²² Speaking of the relation between *Ping* and *Film*, Hugh Kenner writes, "This prompts a guess about *Ping's* origins, maybe a helpful guess. It is pertinent to the emphasis on lighting, the absence of details as though in over-exposure, and does help to explain what became of the verbs. Each frame of film is so, like a noun, and the action, normally specified by verbs, is an allusion generated by the frames' successiveness. Quoted in Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 167.

²³ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 16.

²⁴ Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 206.

²⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 182.

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 152.

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1983), p. 247. The poem in the "ADDENDA (1)" of *Watt*, "expresses" the inherent failure of language as a means of representation and to bring meaning to the metaphysical plight of being:

who may tell the tale
of the old man?
weigh absence in a scale?
mete want with a span?
the sum assess
of the world's woes?
nothingness
in words enclose?

²⁸ Percy Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1109.

²⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 67-8.

³⁰ The image is similar to the description in *Texts for Nothing*: "but kinds of things still, all at once, all going, until nothing, there never was anything, never can be, life and death all nothing, that kind of thing." Samuel Beckett, "Texts for Nothing 5," in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 119.

³¹ "Blue eyes" are often interpreted as Beckett's autobiographical allusion to the colour of his own eyes. See, for example, Susan Brienza's *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, John Pilling's *Samuel Beckett*, and J.E. Dearlove's *Accommodating the Chaos*.

³² James Knowlson, *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* (London: Turret Books, 1972), p. 18.

³³ Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 130.

34 Beckett is certainly echoing Schopenhauer and the idea that the entire world is objectified "Will," and it is this will in the individual surveyor of the world which "tinges the objects of knowledge with its colour" (WWI, II, 336).

35 Samuel Beckett, *How It Is*, p. 30.

36 Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," *Columbia University Forum*, IV, Summer (1961), p. 22.

37 Other critics, such as David Lodge and Susan Brienza to name just two, have also commented on this connection of the being in *Ping* to the crucifixion of Christ. See Susan Brienza. *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 173, and David Lodge, "Some *Ping* Understood," *Encounter* 30 (February 1968): p. 89.

38 Beckett notes in *Malone Dies* first the connection between Spring and Christ's resurrection and second the notion that Christ "rose" from the dead.

39 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 9.

40 James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder, 1979), p. 279. As far as I can tell, this is the only connection that has been made to the importance of the puppet theatre in Beckett's fiction and theatre.

41 Laurence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 411.

42 Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Idea II*, p. 332.

43 This explanation goes some way to answering the point made by David Lodge: "'Ping' itself is the most ambiguous word in the text precisely because it is the one least defined by any referential or structural function in ordinary usage." David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads, and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971). Contains "Some *Ping* Understood," published originally in *Encounter* 30 (1968): 85-89. Seen in relation to the term *Bing* meaning "prison," this sense of escape or movement implied in the term *Ping* reveals the bringing together of opposites that produces another level of erasure.

44 John Pilling. "The Conduct of Narrative in Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction," Diss. (London 1971), p. 610.

45 The fact that *Bing* is French slang for "prison" is found in *Harper's French-English Dictionary of Slang and Colloquialisms*, ed. Joseph Marks, rev. Georgette Marks and Albert J. Farmer (London: Harrap, 1970). While in *How It Is* Beckett experimented with blocks of writing divided by perceivable silences void of writing, the representational form of the remainder of the "residua" texts from *All Strange Away* through to *Lessness*

all exhibit standard narrative structuring (albeit with strange content) in order to reveal the whiteness of the spacing of the “Blanc” in different ways. In *Ping*, Beckett brings together the seventy sentences of the narrative into a solid spatial block that intentionally mimes the shape of the rectangular enclosure and can also be seen as a representational frame that contains the painting of the being within.

46 Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962).

47 The description of the eye in *Ping* is an echo from *Krapp's Last Tape*: “I asked her to look at me and after a few moments – (pause) – after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low) Let me in.” Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 27. The woman in question is a girlfriend based on Beckett's cousin Peggy Sinclair named Bianca, which is the Italian for “white.” Any number of possible interpretations suggest themselves; the eye *Ping* may be connected with physical desire and the idea as in “Assumption” that the artist must forego the desires of the flesh in order to attain a purity of vision concerning the representation of the outside world. It may suggest that the love has now died and that the eye sees nothing of what it once saw, which draws a parallel to *The Lost Ones*, where the searchers in the cylinder look into each other's eyes. However, “whatever it is that they are searching for,” the narrator informs us, “it is not that.”

48 In *Bing*, “unlustrous,” perhaps because it is not actually a word in English, is instead “embu” which at one level does suggest “dullness,” but is also, as Susan Brienza describes in *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds* “a term used for paints meaning that the colors are soaked or dried in, which recalls the drying effect on human skin under the cylinder's harsh light” p. 175. This allusion to “paints” again stresses the connection to *Proust* and the object of *Ping* being the subversion of mimetic representation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Writing *Sous Rature*: Reading the *Blanc* Spaces of Nothingness in *Lessness*

For the most part, madmen do not err in the knowledge of what is immediately present; their raving always relates to what is absent and past, and only through these to their connection with what is present... [T]he thread of memory is broken, the continuity of its connection destroyed, and no uniformly connected recollection of the past is possible. Particular scenes of the past are known correctly, just like the particular present; but there are gaps in their recollection which they fill up with fictions.¹

...the only Paradise that is not the dream of the madman, the Paradise that has been lost.²

The madman is the victim of the rebellion of words.³

As a writer so concerned with both the inability and the obligation to express, it is inevitable that Beckett should court his fair share of detractors, those who remain unconvinced – especially when examining the later short prose texts – that they are not the object of an incomprehensible joke being made at their own expense. *Lessness*, the English translation of the French text *Sans* – the final chapter in the virtual text of the short prose series – could, in fact, be considered the punch-line. When first published, it provoked one reviewer in the *New Statesman* to write, “this bloody awful madman’s magma medly verbal gallimaufry crazy infantile autistic ragout.”⁴ However, an informed reading of *Lessness* demands the context of the other earlier short prose texts which – considered in comparison – reveal just how powerful the medium of writing *sous rature* as a tool to explore the metaphysical plight of being and the “timeless” self had become for Beckett. In *Lessness*, the blending of form and content take the experimentation with the “art and craft” of formalism and writing *sous rature* to a new extreme, as Beckett seeks to confront, once and for all, the expression of the failure to represent any

knowledge of the “timeless” self and the experience of being in the world. Writing *sous rature* in *Lessness* allows Beckett to give expression to the underlying complexities of human existence which traditionally remain outside the “zone” of artistic representation. Since the crux of the metaphysical plight of being is the inability to know whether or not God exists, the contributing factor to the experience of writing *sous rature* in *Lessness* is that it allows Beckett to confront directly the question of God’s existence.

On the dust-jacket of the first edition of *Lessness*, Beckett provided the germ of the idea that he originally intended to explore in the narrative: “*Lessness* has to do with the collapse of some such refuge as that last attempted in *Ping* and with the ensuing situation of the refugee.”⁵ The “refugee” is stranded in the scattered ruins of the “refuge” of an apocalyptic landscape (and language), which is further augmented by the additional information Beckett included which outlines the actual composition of *Lessness* itself. At the time, Beckett referred to his making the text’s composition “all known” as “the only honest thing to do.”⁶ Considering the involved process in producing the final result, this information must be considered not merely as an addendum to the finished work, but as the prologue to the text itself.⁷ Its most immediate function, however, is as an important point of departure for the reader seeking justification for a narrative that appears to ignore every structural device necessary in telling a story:

Lessness proceeds from *Ping*.

It is composed of 6 statement groups containing 10 sentences, i.e. 60 sentences in all.

These 60 sentences are first given in a certain order and paragraph structure, then repeated in a different order and paragraph structure.

The whole consists therefore of $2 \times 60 = 120$ sentences arranged and rearranged in $2 \times 12 = 24$ paragraphs.

Each statement group is formally differentiated and the 10 sentences composing it “signed” by certain elements common to all.

- Group A – Collapse of refuge – Sign: “true refuge.”
- Group B – Outer world – Sign: “earth-sky” juxtaposed or apart.
- Group C – body exposed – Sign: “little body.”
- Group D – Refuge forgotten – Sign: “all gone from mind.”
- Group E – Past and future denied – Sign: “never” – except in the one sentence “figment dawn etc.”
- Group F – Past and future affirmed – Sign: future tense.⁸

This description, which has contributed to critics identifying Beckett as both a “mathematician and a poet,” has subsequently had a direct impact upon how the narrative has been interpreted.⁹ Most commonly, computational examinations have used this material as justification for a smorgasbord of mathematical and linguistic patterns intended to identify and re-organize the apparent chaos of the narrative’s language.¹⁰ P.J. Murphy, who rightly argues against such critical approaches due to their near complete disregard for thematic concerns, contends that the difficulties of *Lessness* are a result of “the lack of an ‘I’ around which the work could take shape.”¹¹ This position, however, overlooks the fact that Beckett intentionally writes himself into the narrative in order that the ensuing examination of the “timeless” self and world can be properly understood. Throughout *Lessness*, Beckett uses the technique of writing *sous rature* as a means to confront the relationship of God to the macrocosm by conflating his own authorial relationship with the text into a metaphor for the relationship of God to the creation of the world, and the resulting experience of being in the world.

In *Lessness*, Beckett is the ‘I’ around whom the events of the text take place, and as in the “prologue” to *Imagination Dead Imagine*, he first creates all the elements that will give shape to the world (as outlined above) and which metaphorically give God presence, and then puts the elements and God in relation to the created world, *sous rature*.¹² Thus, when

Ruby Cohn argues that instead “of a voice straining against or towards Nothing, Beckett tries to efface his narrator in a precise impersonal account of an inanimate world,” nothing could be further from the truth.¹³ Instead, Beckett subsequently crosses out the author/God/narrator from the process of an *ordered* creation, reconstituting God throughout the narrative as the presence of a *blanc* “timeless” nothing – not as a *no thing* – but as the something of nothing that is encapsulated in the term “lessness” itself. Therefore, when describing the “chance” production of *Lessness* in her study *Back to Beckett*, Cohn is essentially describing Beckett’s process of creation through putting the presence of God/author/narrator *sous rature*, which results in the direct parallel between God in relation to the world as an image of the “timeless” nothing, and the experience of this “timeless” nothing as the underlying *something* that informs the experience between the reader and the text, and by extension, between being and the world:

[Beckett] wrote each of these sixty sentences on a separate piece of paper, mixed them all in a container, and then drew them out in random order twice. This became the order of the hundred and twenty sentences in *Sans*. Beckett then wrote the number 3 on four separate pieces of paper, the number 4 on six pieces of paper, the number 5 on four pieces, the number 6 on six pieces, and the number 7 on four pieces of paper. Again drawing randomly, he ordered the sentences into paragraphs according to the number drawn, finally totaling one hundred and twenty.¹⁴

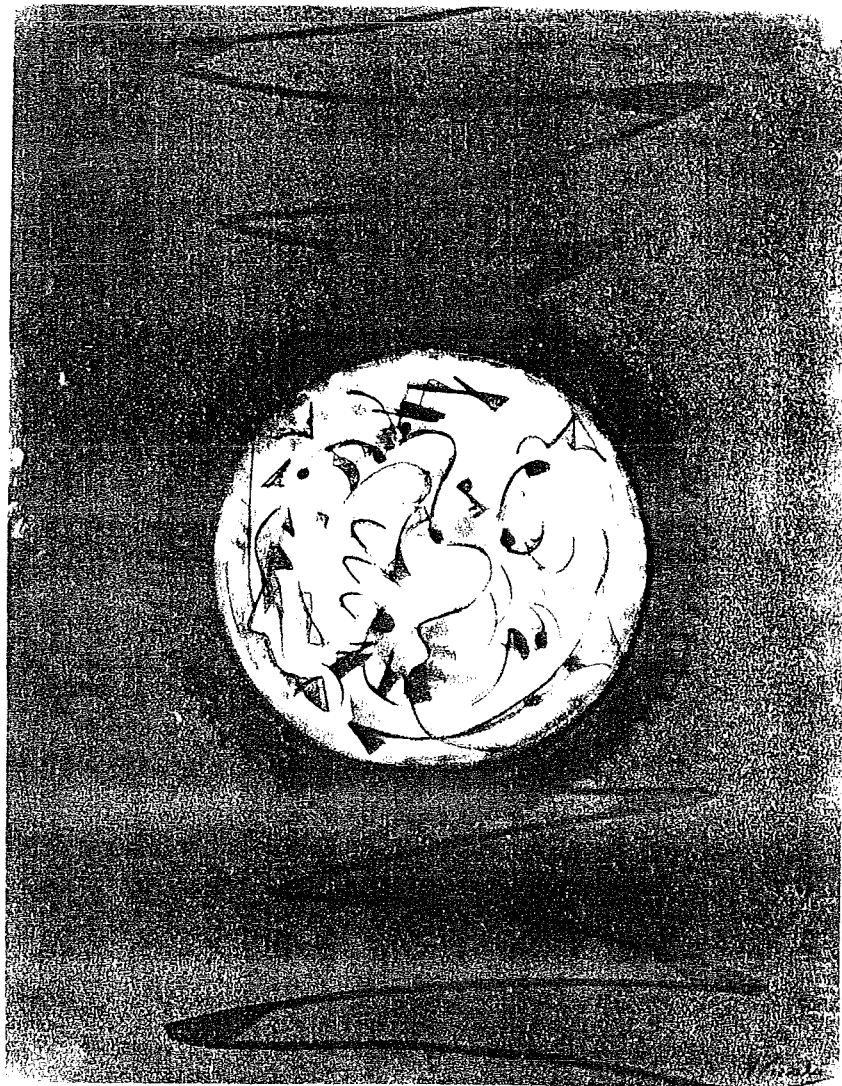
As the narrator in *Enough* states, “[t]he art of combining is... a curse from above.”¹⁵ Here in *Lessness*, Beckett leaves the traces of order, and the effects of the erasure of that order, visible just below the surface of the text. Order, in other words, is not canceled out, but is crossed out, as the omnipotence associated with the author’s relationship to the narrative world is put *sous rature*, thereby producing something closer to what in *Molloy* is called the “doing [of] an undoing.”¹⁶ The idea that Beckett is seeking to express through this

technique, is that God creating the world is initially represented as a presence, and then, by allowing the chance combination of the text to unfold, the presence of God is put *sous rature* – leaving behind the scattered traces of the “timeless” spaces of nothingness that are the presence of His absence. The experience of both “refugee” and reader alike is therefore the experience of this “timeless” nothingness that manifests in all objects, each reflecting the presence of the absence of God, and the failure of being to account with any certainty for itself or the world at large. In short, by employing his own relation to the text, Beckett situates the question of God as being’s experience of God existing *sous rature* – the presence of an absence that produces, and defines, the metaphysical experience of the “timeless” as the something of nothing that remains beyond the limits of signification.

Beckett’s technique of writing *sous rature* in *Lessness* – the act of writing and then crossing out in order to represent the underlying nothingness that is the metaphysical experience of being – has a significant effect on the form of the narrative itself.¹⁷ Seen from a certain angle, *sous rature* allows Beckett to represent the narrative as a metaphor for the instability of the expanding macrocosm. Although *Lessness* was originally organized, and its contents created, it is directly through the chance combination of the sentences that Beckett represents God as a disinterested party (similar to Hume’s conception of God as outside of the world).¹⁸ Lacking a central ordering principle “in the beginning,” and because there exists no original ordered version, the text has no known end.¹⁹ Therefore, while there must be a finite number of different combinations,²⁰ being void of an original ordered representation, the combinations could conceivably go on

indefinitely (could be continuously written and crossed out and written again and so on), which is exactly what John Pilling means when he speaks of the “in-built feeling of eternity in the text.”²¹ Therefore, this work, and the world that it represents, was not created once and for all, but continues to expand upon (and into) Beckett’s concern with representing nothingness.

Given that *Sans* and *Lessness* are the most closely translated works of the “residua” texts, it is significant that Beckett did not literally translate the “original” French title *Sans*, but chose instead to title the English text *Lessness*.²² It is possible that the reason for the difference between the two titles is due to the fact that Beckett intended them to be considered in relation to one another. The title *Sans* speaks to Beckett’s own relation to the text, and by extension, to a world “without” a stable organizing centre, while the title *Lessness* can be taken in two different ways. On the one hand, it means a progressive diminishment towards nothing, or the something of the “timeless” nothing as opposed to an “absolute” absence or *no thing*. Therefore, “lessness” first signifies the relation of Beckett to the construction of the text as a metaphor for God to the world, and second, the *blanc* spaces posited throughout the narrative that are the problematical “timeless” spaces that result from the world being “without” a knowable organizing centre. On the other hand, the title *Lessness* conflates the suffix “less” and “ness” to mean an “unfixed state of being,” which suggests the “timeless” “thing in itself” of being that continuously problematizes any attempt to represent what it means to be in the world. “Without” the “absolute” presence of God, and instead with the presence of God as an image of a “timeless” nothing, the experience of being in the world is not only chillingly unstable,



Nuala Painting for *Lessness*. (Located in Ruby Cohn *Back to Beckett*, p.205.)

but reflects within it this same experience of nothingness that is reflected in terms of the indefinable “timeless” self.

This difference between the two titles can also be attributed to Beckett’s perspective on translation. For Beckett, the act of translation is not defined as a literal transposition of one word for its “equivalent” in another language. Beckett recognized that the life of language is such that it resists the “absolutes” of meaning that might be falsely attributed to it; the relationship between signifier and signified, in other words, is one that is essentially non-relational (one is reminded of Watt and his “pot”). Further, the act of translation, and the impossibility of a literal repetition *sans* difference, foregrounds Beckett’s belief in the inadequacy of language as a mantic device for coming to terms with the experience of the “timeless.”²³ Therefore, the fact that the only notable change between *Sans* and *Lessness* is the titles, suggests that Beckett intended the structure of *Lessness* to be read through what he found so appealing about writing in French. According to James Knowlson it was,

...easier, Beckett maintained, to write in French “without style.” He did not mean by this that his French had no style, but that, by adopting another language, he gained a greater simplicity and objectivity, French offered him the freedom to concentrate on a more direct expression of the search for “being” and on an exploration of ignorance, impotence, and indigence. Using French also enabled him to “cut away the excess, to strip away the color” and to concentrate more on the music of language, its sounds and its rhythms.²⁴

Thus, the structure of *Lessness*, the reasoning behind Beckett’s writing in French, and the “timeless” self of being are manifest when considering the close proximity of the language between *Sans* and *Lessness*.²⁵ Writing in French not only helped Beckett avoid

the abstractions of English (as early as his poetry written prior to *Dream*), but also to eliminate the stylistics which emphasize the subjective presence of the author within what might appear to be an objectified representation of the world.²⁶ For Beckett, writing in French is essentially writing *sous rature*; in *Lessness* it obscures the relation of the writer to the representation of the narrative which Beckett employs as a metaphor for God to the world, while also allowing him “to strip away the color” of the stylistic effect of English that contributes to obscuring, instead of uncovering, the “timeless” *blanc* nothingness of being. Therefore, while *Lessness* is certainly abstract and the invention of a “hermetic language,” it must be read through Beckett’s underlying objectives concerning his decision to write in French in order to avoid the stylistics and abstractions characteristic of writing in English (which binds the “original” *Sans* to *Lessness*) that only contribute to problematizing the quest of the writer to represent the experience of being in the world.

A second contributing factor to the representation of the metaphysical plight of being in *Lessness* is, of course, the strange construction of the words and phrases in the text itself. Earlier formalist critics have read the form of the narrative not only through its underlying mathematical structuring, but also as prose (like *Bing/Ping*) that appears to bear a close connection to poetry, which is augmented, for example, by the different repetitions of the phrase, “Never but imagined the blue in a wild imagination the blue celeste of poesy” (201) throughout the text. According to Susan Brienza, the form of *Lessness* challenges,

the strong tendency of the reader to process a narrative sequentially, a reading experience Beckett is forcing us to suspend and a characteristic of narrative fiction that he is asking us to suspect. Instead, we are compelled to move back and forth, up and down, over and through the words in this

text – visually, imagistically, linguistically – as we do when immersing ourselves in a poem.²⁷

The chance construction of the narrative – just as the earlier punctuation-less *How It Is* – does force the reader to read *Lessness* differently. While Brienza is right in identifying the fact that Beckett is forcing us to experience the narrative by moving “back and forth, up and down” and so on, as opposed to “sequentially,” the contention that this reading experience is comparable to reading a “poem,” is suspect. Regardless of whether one is reading poetry or prose, the reader is always experiencing the language and the object that the language represents sequentially simply due to the laws that govern the relation of non-relation between perceiver and perceived. There is no physical position, in other words, that one can take in relation to any given object under consideration (be it language or otherwise) that can be said to represent the object in its entirety. All experience is dictated through the laws of perception, and therefore is defined by observations that are experienced sequentially before being reorganized and unified in the mind.

What Beckett is actually representing in the chance placement of the language in *Lessness* and the world that it represents, is the experience of “sequentially” as the chief source of the malady of being: that is, the inability to experience the object under consideration all at once, and the subsequent production of unity produced by the mind as it re-organizes the sensory data, filling in the *blanc* spaces of the unperceived unknown into an ordered and unified whole. Thus, Beckett intentionally breaks up the words and phrases in *Lessness* to “diminish the shame” of a poetics that contributes further to

obscuring the underlying “timeless” nothing that is always erased by a process of substitution each time that an object is artificially envisioned as whole in the mind. The defamiliarization of the language in the text is Beckett’s attempt to put the familiar, ordered perception which accompanies the subjectively infused experience of the inaccessibly objective “timeless” world, *sous rature*. As such, the complexity of the world of *Lessness*, as it is generated through the chance placement of language, forms a world picture that allows Beckett to confront the infinite complexities of the world as non-signified “timeless” spaces of nothing prior to the mind’s automatic simplification and reorganization of those complexities. *Lessness* challenges the way in which being interprets the world through perception and by extension language, as Beckett seeks to void the poetics that make their way into language and diminish the ability of being to identify and express the underlying nothingness of the “timeless” that problematize our knowledge.

Therefore in *Lessness*, Beckett forces the reader into this heightened state of awareness by foregrounding the *blanc* spaces of nothing that exists between the words themselves – the very spaces which problematize the ability of being to make sense of the world in any “absolute” terms. Indeed, Beckett’s construction of *Lessness* contributes a new dimension to what he stated in the *Three Dialogues* as the objective of the artist to “express” the “nothing to express.”²⁸ In *Lessness*, the relation of the non-relation between the subject and the object becomes the means of revealing the presence of the absence that exists between God and the “occasion” of the world and by extension being, who is framed within that “occasion” or “zone.” By constantly being made aware that something – be it

a word or a phrase – appears to be missing, the experience of reading is the confrontation with the content of the *blanc* spaces of nothing which make the comprehension of the world, in the form of the text, problematical prior to the mind's artificial reorganization. For example, the first "sentence" of *Lessness* that reads, "Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind" (197), is void of the necessary ordering words that would fill in the *blanc* spaces. Indeed, it is the *blanc* spaces that exist between the words that are the "residua" of the failure of language in its inability to represent the "timeless" world in "absolute" terms. As a result, these *blanc* spaces of nothing become something – the presence of an absence which allows the "timeless" nothing to take shape (and yet remain beyond the limits of language). As discussed in the first chapter of this study, Derrida describes a similar process of representation:

It is a dramatization which illustrates nothing, which illustrates the nothing, lights up a space, re-marks a spacing as a nothing: white as a yet written page, blank as a difference between two lines.²⁹

Therefore, the danger in neat identifications which follows the act of substituting words to fill in the *blanc* spaces of nothing mimics the means by which being attempts to represent "absolutes" – through perception and language – where no "absolutes" are actually present.³⁰ The attempt to construct false borders that situate something (in this case, words) in the place of nothing is a futile task, in that any number of words can be posited, while none can be said to express what the *blanc* spaces of nothingness represent. Thus, Beckett is making explicit that while language is intended to allow us to understand the metaphysics of being and the world, language only smoothes away the underlying complexities that form the ruptures in human knowledge of the "timeless." In *Lessness*, it is the "unfathomable abysses of silence" of the *blanc* spaces between the

words that form these ruptures where this “timeless” nothingness is located.³¹ Thus, the experience of the reader in *Lessness* is most specifically intended to be “between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms,” where the “timeless” nothingness is inextricably situated within the experience of being in world, and always without the limits of language.³²

Sans and *Lessness* also combine the idea of an unknown temporal beginning which puts the presence of God *sous rature*, and which is coupled with the temporal component of time as an indication of the “timeless” self. The title *Lessness*, taken as a temporal device, first implies the “timeless,” or *timelessness* of both being and world, and second, the diminishment towards, but not the arrival at, an “absolute” zero or “beginning.” Contributing to this emphasis on time, each set of sixty sentences in *Lessness* is intended to represent the number of seconds in one minute, the twenty-four paragraphs the number of hours in a day, and the maximum number of seven sentences in each paragraph to signify the number of days in a week.³³ This historical temporal framework is set in opposition throughout *Lessness* to the subject’s experience of the *timelessness* of being, which can be illustrated through this brief exchange between Vladimir and Estragon following the spectacle between Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*:

Vladimir: That passed the time.
 Estragon: It would have passed in any case.
 Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly.
*Pause.*³⁴

In this passage, Beckett is representing the subjective experience of time – time can speed up or slow down, depending on the task being observed or performed. Thus, time, as

Beckett describes it in *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), “[l]eaps from dot to dot with so lightning a leap that but for its new position it had not stirred. Whole nights may pass as may a fraction of a second.”³⁵ Similarly in *Lessness*, Beckett subverts the absolutes of linear time through different repetitions of the phrase, “Never but in passing dream the passing hour long short” (198). The binary opposition “long short” illustrates that the duration, even of an hour, is ultimately problematized by the subjective experience of time, while placing these terms side-by-side allows Beckett to have one cross the other out, and therefore represent the stability of subjective time, *sous rature*. Through the integration of time into the mind of the being in *Lessness*, the historical structures of “time” are “out of mind,” and instead merge into the “big buzzing blooming confusion” of a dream: “Never but in dream the days and nights made of dreams of other nights better days” (200). The effect, is that while time remains external and part of the will to organize the events in the outside world, the subjective experience of time in the self is essentially “timeless.”

While the mind puts the ordered representation of historical time *sous rature* through the “timeless” self, Beckett also represents external time as written *sous rature* through the “little body” of the refugee. The “upright” image of the body of the “refugee” with “Legs a single block arms fast to sides little body” (198) is a metaphor for the hands of a clock, simultaneously denoting that “It is midnight,” or that it is rather “not midnight” but twelve noon.³⁶ Philip Solomon explains that the body of the refugee may also suggest six p.m. or six a.m.: “we are informed that this dolman-like figure is grey, which reveals that the hands of our metaphorical clock must point to a time halfway between noon and midnight or midnight and noon. Thus the hour in question is 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. Each is a

moment of transition with respect to light and dark – the grey of dawn or the grey of dusk.”³⁷ Beckett binds two temporal moments together, paralleling a discussion by Saint Augustine in the *Confessions*:

...time emerges from some secret *refuge* when it passes from the future to the present, and goes back into hiding when it moves into the past. But while we are measuring it [time], where is it coming from, what is it passing through, and where is it going? It can only be coming from the future, passing through the present, and going into the past. In other words, it is coming out of what does not yet exist, passing through what has no duration, and passing into what no longer exists.³⁸ (*italics mine*)

For Saint Augustine, time is the presence of an absence, “it is coming out of what does not exist, passing through what has no duration, and passing into what no longer exists.” In *Lessness*, the “little body” of the “refugee” has become an image of two paradoxical, yet indistinguishable experiences of time: twelve noon and twelve midnight, six a.m. and six p.m. The difference between these times is represented by Beckett as unknown, as time crosses its opposition out and becomes the representation of the “timeless” as nothing. In other words, time, as something experienced over the space of a lifetime, in both the mind and the body as an ordering agent for the experience of being, has been put *sous rature*, reduced to an image of nothing. Indeed, this is why Beckett places the refugee in the sand. Although sand can suggest any number of possible symbols, in *Lessness* sand is an image of being trapped in the chaos of time – that “false time” as a means to formally organize being is now “out of mind.”³⁹

The series of binary oppositions that appear throughout *Lessness* is not intended to produce “absolute” negation, but is instead meant to continue Beckett’s practice of writing *sous rature* as the means to representing the nothingness that undermines the

appearance of “absolute” certainties. Beckett combines specific images which are used to organize and “make sense” of being and world in order to accentuate the “timeless” nothingness that puts the will to order, *sous rature*. For example, the phrase, “Never but this changelessness” (200) first introduces the negation “never” which is then followed, and put *sous rature* by the word “but,” which crosses out the absoluteness of “never.” The final term, “change,” which is intended to indicate the flux of human experience, is joined with “lessness,” which together suggest that due to the ongoing changes in any object that the “timeless” is constantly beyond the limits of the known. Therefore, while a term like “meaninglessness” implies “without meaning,” and “hopelessness” suggests “without hope,” “lessness” taken on its own, functions as a linguistic parasite that infects representations that are used to facilitate a sense of meaning to the “timeless” self. For example, “Timeless” in the phrase “never was but... timeless” (199) is time that has been put *sous rature* and reconstituted into an image of nothingness; “endlessness” in the phrase, “in the endlessness he will make it” (198) puts the spatial conception of an end *sous rature*. Beckett is stating that nothing less than nothing underlies all temporal and spatial projections employed to organize the experience of being in relation to itself and to the world. As a result, the experience of being is “issueless,” as each “absolute” spatial or temporal form in *Lessness* is put *sous rature* in order to represent the underlying a-spatial and a-temporal “timeless” as the nothingness that exists below the surface of all things.⁴⁰

In *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, Susan Brienza undertakes a thorough analysis of the relationship of the word and phrase units in *Lessness*, stating that the relationships

between the narrative's multiple binary oppositions conclude with the phrases canceling each other out.⁴¹ However, in the quest to represent nothingness as the unknown "thing in itself" that underlies all human existence, Beckett is more accurately seeking to write the experience of being *sous rature* in order to create a presence which, transformed into an absence, illustrates nothingness. For example, the repetition of these oppositions are scattered throughout the narrative: "ruins/refuge," "old love new love" (198), "day and night" (199), "*little void mighty light*" (199, italics mine), long short" (198), "black/white," "never but" (198), "all gone" (198) and so on. By positing the presence of the first term (or phrase) followed by its binary opposition in the second term, Beckett does not mean to suggest that the second term cancels the first term out. The presence of the second term is dependent, at least initially, upon the presence of the first term. The second term puts the first term *sous rature*, but does not negate its presence "absolutely." The second term only makes the first term and itself an image of nothing – the presence of an absence – an image not of *no thing* (or an "absolute" absence), but of "lessness." There can, in essence, be no final "self-canceling" taking place. Therefore, Beckett is instead writing *sous rature* in order to leave a *blanc* spaces of nothing in the place of an absolute *no thing*, and to underscore the inability of being to produce any "absolute" knowledge of its experience of the world or itself.

In *Lessness*, the importance of the term "refuge" is that it speaks directly to belief in God and, by extension, the "refuge" that such belief affords to those who have unquestioning faith in the existence of God. The fact that Beckett spoke of the experience of the "refugee" as that of "the collapse of some such refuge" reveals the breakdown of

unquestioning belief, which is dramatized by the “ruins” which have now become the refugee’s “true refuge.” Beckett represents this breakdown of belief by writing and then putting specific descriptions *sous rature* through re-representation. The statement, “Four square long last four walls over backwards” (197) makes an appearance and then is put *sous rature* by the re-writing or new chance organization of, “True refuge long last issueless scattered down four walls over backwards no sound.” Organized space is being described as space that is “without” limits, reflecting on “all sides endlessness” and a “slow” fading out into the nothingness.⁴² In *Lessness*, the effect is the breaking down of all the barriers that organize space in the world (which is a reflection of the same experience of the narrative “without” the organizing centre of it’s author). With God put *sous rature* and thereby represented as nothing, the shelter of belief quite simply falls away: “Blackened out fallen open four walls over backwards true refuge issueless” (197) which gives way to the *blanc* spaces of nothing reflected everywhere in the forms that make up the narrative.⁴³

While that “poor old brute” Mahood in *The Unnamable* is “incapable of cursing his creator,” other characters from Beckett’s *oeuvre* achieve some of their most vigorous expressions when cursing God. In *Endgame*, Hamm exclaims, “The bastard! He doesn’t exist!,”⁴⁴ while in *Mercier and Camier*, Mercier, throws his umbrella to the ground, lifts his face to the sky exclaiming, “As for thee, fuck thee,” to which Camier knowingly replies, “You should know better. It’s he on the contrary fucks thee.”⁴⁵ In *Lessness*, the only real sense of the subjectivity of the “refugee” is expressed with the affirmation of

action that is produced in the future tense “will.” The interjection of this future tense is explicitly directed towards the subject’s relationship with God in the past:

He will curse God again as in the blessed days face to the open sky the passing deluge... On him will rain again as in the blessed days of blue the passing cloud. (197)

“Blessed” and “curse” form an obvious opposition which allows the one to put the other *sous rature*. The refugee *will* curse God *again* in the future as a result of the perpetual experience of God as the presence of an absence, as a presence that has always, since the very earliest “blessed days,” been “timeless.” The allusions to “the open sky,” the “passing deluge,” and the “rain” are all intended to allude to the story of Moses in Genesis 6:17, where God says, “Behold I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh,” and later in Genesis 7:12, “And the rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.” As one critic has pointed out, “all of Genesis concerns cyclic birth and death – a void, creation, destruction, rebirth, and renewal – [and this] makes it the perfect mythological home for Beckett’s little body caught between nonbeing and being.”⁴⁶ As in *How It Is*, the notion of a God who will emerge as an “absolute” presence from the matrix of the *blanc* nothing is little more than nostalgia – an idea belonging to the “blessed days.” With nothingness represented everywhere on the landscape of *Lessness*, along with the image of the refugee, the notion of God as an “absolute” presence is a “Figment light never was but grey air timeless no sound” (197). The “figment light” that “never was” dispels the Biblical correlation between the presence of a Christian God and “The Light,” which is compounded further by the allusion to the “timeless” subjectivity of being. The doubt in the mind of the refugee reflects out

everywhere in the destruction of false illusions, as the little body cursing God is intended to be an act which entails with it the “dispeller of figments” (201).

The collapse of the refuge in the macrocosm which the being in *Lessness* experiences, and the ensuing scattered “ruins,” have a direct effect upon how the being (similar to the reader in relation to the language) perceives the world. Indeed, without the “absolute” presence of a central controlling divinity, the elements which together form the world and are – according to Christian belief – said to reflect God, undergo significant changes. Beckett, as he did earlier in *Murphy* (1938) and later in *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), uses Leibniz’s model of the monadic universe to confront directly the question of God as the controlling centre of the macrocosm. According to Leibniz, the universe is a closed system created by God, and contains an infinite number of monads or perceiving atoms. From its particular position, each monad reflects all the others in the universe, while the only monad that perceives the whole universe with clarity is the central monad, God. God has so ordered the universe in “pre-established harmony” that a change in one monad is reflected in every other monad. Each monad functions like a mirror wherein the entire universe becomes a series of reflections turned inwards, endlessly reflecting one another and God at the centre.⁴⁷

In *Lessness*, by having the presence of God manifest itself as the presence of an absence, and therefore an image of a “timeless” nothing, Beckett is able to employ Leibniz’s model of the monadic universe for his own purposes. Instead of the elements of the “outer world” reflecting the presence of an ordering divinity, the “ash grey sky mirrored

earth mirrored sky,” (198) function as spatial monads that only reflect one another and, in doing so, reveal that no God can be “absolutely” at their centre. Because the “Earth sky as one all sides endlessness,” reflect one another, these monads are organized around nothing, since with nothing between them, they can only reflect each other. Therefore, the universe, void of the presence of an organizing centre, is reflected in each monad, which, reflecting all other monads, mirrors the image of God as a “timeless” unknown nothing, and erasing difference, produce, the “earth sky as one.” In the following passage Derrida alludes to the structure of the Leibniz monadic universe, and the question of an organizing centre:

It has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The centre is the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre.⁴⁸

The centre, because it is not a part of the structure, exists *within* the structure and paradoxically *without* the structure simultaneously. God is present, is the organizing centre of the universe, yet is also absent, because He exists outside of “absolute” knowledge and the events of the world as reflected in each monad. For Beckett, as for Derrida, the centre is not the centre in any “absolute” terms, but is the presence of an absence – something that is within and without the structure of the world – every spatial monad reflects the “same grey as the sand ash grey.” The “earth mirrors sky mirrors ruins” putting *sous rature* any sense of difference between the elements of the world which would promote order, and those that would reflect with any certainty the creation of the cosmos by a God figure. Therefore, “all sides endlessness earth sky as one no

sound no stir” and “Grey air timeless earth sky as one same grey as the ruins flatness endless” reflect the presence of God as an absence outside of the world. The final effect gives presence to the absence of God as an image of a “timeless” *blanc* nothing.

The effect on the “little body” of the “refugee” trapped in this apocalyptic landscape mirrors not only the surrounding emptiness, but becomes another monadic spatial form that reflects the surrounding “timeless” nothing. Similar to *Imagination Dead Imagine*, where “grey” is employed to signify the chaos within the microcosmic rotunda, in *Lessness*, instead of reflecting the “light,” the body, with “Legs a single block arms fast to sides,” like one of Murphy’s chessmen, reflects the “grey” nothingness which surrounds it. The “little body” of the “refugee” becomes another spatial form disappearing, as the surface of the body is described as “grey smooth” and without curves, having “no relief” that would differentiate between “figure and ground,” but only “a few holes.” Because the monadic “little body” of the “refugee” reflects the absence of an ordering centre – *esse est percipi* – it mirrors the “ash grey” of “all” other spatial monads on “all sides earth sky body ruins” and is therefore put *sous rature*. The “timeless” nothingness of God, in other words, is reflected in the “little body” that is the “same grey as the earth sky ruins,” and the “[a]sh grey all sides earth sky as one all sides endlessness.” Being is therefore necessarily an image represented *sous rature* – as housing an unknown *timelessness*. With the “Earth sand same grey as the air sky ruins body fine ash grey sand,” the “refugee” is the image of God and the “light” – a reflection of the grey “timeless” space of nothing.

In his outline of *Lessness*, Beckett combines the “refuge forgotten” with the phrase, “all gone from mind.” With the representation of the world containing within it a “timeless” nothingness, the notion of the “absolute” presence of God in the “refuge” has been “forgotten” by the “refugee.” In order to represent the inward gaze towards the microcosm of the mind, the writing of the “eyes” is put *sous rature* whenever it is linked to the body: “Little body grey face features crack and little holes two pale blue.” The word “eyes” should follow the word “blue,” and yet, the eyes represent the presence of an absence (something that the reader recognizes as missing). Instead, the word “eye” always gets written in the sentence that follows, in which Beckett substitutes the outward perceiving “eyes” for the inward facing “eye” of the mind. For example, “planes sheer white *eye* calm long last all gone from mind,” “Face to white calm touch close *eye* calm long last all gone from mind” and “Face to calm *eye* touch close all calm all white all gone from mind” (italics mine). The fact that the mind does not contain within it the forms of the outer world – “all gone from mind” – but is instead essentially a *blanc* space, suggests that Beckett may have been drawing upon an opinion voiced by Descartes in the *Meditations*:

Nevertheless, the belief that there is a God who is all-powerful, and who created me, such as I am, has for a long time, obtained steady possession of my mind. How, then, do I know that he has not arranged that there should be neither earth, nor sky, nor any extended thing, nor figure, nor magnitude, nor place, providing at the same time, however, for the persuasion that these do not exist otherwise than as I perceive them?⁴⁹

Descartes, of course, does not call into question the existence of God, but the existence of the outside world as it is perceived by the senses. The external world, as Descartes suggests, could be little more than the “little fabric” of a vision that God has constructed

in the mind of being. Beckett similarly represents the external world of “sky,” “cloud,” “earth” and so on, *sous rature*, and therefore as images of nothing by putting the “eyes” that perceive the outer world *sous rature*. As a result, Beckett extends this “timeless” nothingness to include the external world as it exists in the internal mind of the refugee. The eye, looking within, only sees the “blank planes touch close sheer white” of the “Four square all light sheer white planes” of the mind, not only putting the black shapes of the external world *sous rature* in the phrase “all gone from mind,” but also necessarily the presence of God.⁵⁰ Therefore, the mind, another monadic mirror, mirrors the blankness that has come to be the experience of the outer world; inner and outer worlds reflect one another, and both reflect the *blanc* nothingness that reconstitutes the presence of God as an absence.

In the past, critics have argued that the refugee is immobile. It is this immobility which contributes to the “little body” of the “refugee” appearing to undergo a complete disappearance and become an absence. There is “no stir,” “no sound,” “not a breath” as the body is erased into the “same grey all sides earth sky body ruins” of the entire macrocosm. However, it is clear that Beckett is intending the reader to be witness to a cyclical cycle of mobility and immobility in the body of the refugee: “One step more one alone all alone in the sand no hold he will make it.” The operative term in the first part of this “sentence” is “more,” which implies that movement has taken place in the past, and alludes to the fact that the refugee is in the process of moving forward into a different future. Affirmation then, is the future, and is based on this shift from immobility to mobility: “In the sand no hold one step more in the endlessness he will make it.” The

refugee “will make it” because the spatial monads begin to reflect the refugee: “He will stir in the sand there will be stir in the sky the air the sand.” Beckett is representing being as the new centre of inquiry that will in turn bring meaning to the “timeless” self of being, and by extension to the “timeless” nothing of the external world.

In *Lessness*, the form and content both mirror the nothingness which Beckett situates as the central dilemma of being. Only through expressing the “timeless” self of being as “nothing” is it possible to move below the surface of experience and into the depths of that which resists signification. In *Lessness*, the nothingness that underlies all experience and which constitutes the “timeless” uncertainties of being is the inability to come to “absolute” terms with the idea of God. God exists only as something that can be known through language, and given that language is an inadequate tool in the quest for establishing the meaning of being, the representation of language in *Lessness* reflects this metaphysical dilemma. Therefore, it is only through writing *sous rature* – to produce a text that is saturated with presence and absence – that the “timeless” as nothing can be represented, and the question of God as the matrix through which this nothingness that is the experience of the “timeless” self, can be expressed through the very inadequacies of language to represent anything concerning being in the world in “absolute” terms..

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* vol. I, trans. R.B. Haldance and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, 1909), pp. 248-249.
- 2 Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931), p. 55.
- 3 Edmond Jabes, *Je batis ma demeure: Poemes, 1943-1957* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) p. 67.
- 4 Anonymous, *New Statesman*, "Much of A Moreness" (8 May 1970), p. 660.
- 5 Samuel Beckett, *Lessness*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), pp. 197-201. All future references are to this edition.
- 6 Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 265. All future references are to this edition.
- 7 Peter Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 112. All future references are to this edition.
- 8 This material can be found in Martin Esslin's article, "Samuel Beckett – Infinity, Eternity" contained in *Beckett at 80/ Beckett in Context*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 118.
- 9 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) p. 180. All future references are to this edition.
- 10 J.M. Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett's *Lessness*: An Exercise in Decomposition," *Computers and the Humanities* 7 (1973): p. 197. For example, J.M. Coetzee explains that, "an unambiguous segmentation of the text into 106 different phrases varying in length from 1 to 12 words and occurring, on average, 5.7 times each." Similarly, syntactical examinations such as Susan Brienza's *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds* attempt "to consider *Lessness* as the sample of another dialect, and to describe in linguistic detail the structure of this new language" p. 182.
- 11 Peter Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett*, p. 113.
- 12 S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). According to Gontarski, Beckett's revision, "is often towards a pattern of disconnection, as motifs are organized not by causality but by...the conscious destruction of logical relations, the fracturing of consistent narrative, the abandonment of linear argument, and the substitution of more abstract patterns of numbers, music, and so forth, to shape a work" p. 4.

13 Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, p.267-8.

14 Ibid. p.266. Significantly, Cohn concludes by stating, "I suppose that many readers will share my disturbance that random distribution should organize his [Beckett's] work" p. 266. Random distribution, as I seek to show in this chapter, is part of the process of producing the "timeless" nothingness that exists between words, the presence of the absence of God (a positive nothingness), and the *a priori* of sense data before it has been reconstituted into ordered perception.

15 Samuel Beckett, *Enough*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 187. All future references to *Enough* are to this edition.

16 Samuel Beckett, "Molloy" in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy/ Malone Dies/ The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p. 74. Confronted with the chaotic language of *Lessness* the reader will certainly be reminded of Celia, who "felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time." Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1938), p. 40.

17 Samuel Beckett, *transition*, no.21, p. 148. This is remindful of what Beckett wrote on a postcard to Billie Whitelaw concerning *Footfalls* which was quoted to Enoch Brater by Martin Esslin: "What matters is the rhythm of the piece – the words are merely what pharmacists call the excipient." Enoch Brater's *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 38.

18 By considering the spatial geometry of the narrative in *Lessness*, a similar process of repetition as in the searchers of *The Lost Ones* is being represented. In this instance, through the relationship between the differences found in the act of repetition that constitute habit. "Habit," according to Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, is "the great deadener," and in a very limiting definition, can be defined as the repetition of any given *action*. And yet, by constructing *Lessness* in this way, Beckett draws the reader's attention to difference in repetition, and that difference always *inhabits* repetition. Since the narrative is the result of the process of drawing sixty sentences from the container once, and then a second time, the construction of *Lessness* reflects the repetitiousness nature of habit.

19 This, as opposed to the notion that this expansion will only happen for as long as there are combinations. Even if, at some point in the future, the text were to be repeated, it would only be a repetition of a repetition. As long as an "original" ordered text does not exist, the text has no origin at all. Indeed, a repetition of another repetition would still not produce the same overall order of difference in repetition that had occurred up to that point. Repeating differences in repetition, in other words, would only further serve to promote the fact that the text does not have an original order.

20 Philip H. Solomon, "Purgatory unpurged: time, space, and language in *Lessness*" in the *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Autumn 1980) no.6, p. 63-72. It is problematical that Solomon attempts to build on Coetzee's discussion of the segment distribution in *Lessness*. According to Solomon, Coetzee's argument needs to be qualified because, "it holds true only for sentences within the same paradigm, although segments from one paradigm can be found in other paradigms" p. 71. This fascinating insight, similar to those made by Coetzee, tells the reader absolutely nothing about the metaphysical concern that is so central to the text itself.

21 John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 51.

22 The change in the title in *Sans/Lessness* is also true of the earlier texts *Le Dépeupleur/The Lost Ones* and *Bing/Ping*.

23 Patrick Bowles, who assisted with the translation of *Molloy* makes the point: "From the outset [Beckett] stressed that it shouldn't be merely 'translated'; we should write a new book in the new language. For with the transposition of speech occurs a transposition of thought, and even at times, of action." Quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: a Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 439. Further, Richard Seavor, who helped Beckett with the translation of two of the *Nouvelles*, *La Fin* and *L'Expulsé*: "What we ended up with was not a translation but a complete redoing of the original. And yet, even though it was completely different, he was totally faithful to the French. It was a completely new creation." Quoted in James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 81. For Beckett, translation is not a re-creation but a "completely new creation." The changes between these two texts, however, are minimal, and it is the choice of the difference in the titles that holds the greatest interest, as each contributes to the writing *sous rature* and the idea of nothingness as the metaphysical experience of being.

24 James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 324.

25 Beckett explained to Lawrence Harvey that the reason he turned to French was that, "for him, an Irishman, French represented a form of weakness by comparison with his mother tongue...The relative asceticism of French seemed more appropriate to the expression of being, undeveloped, unsupported somewhere in the depths of the microcosm." Laurence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 196.

26 Beckett's writing in French virtually eliminates the presence of the author because it puts the ornamentation of style (that defines Joyce's writing) *sous rature*. The irony, of course, is that this absence of style is one of the distinguishing features of Beckett's writing (what better means to achieve nothingness?).

27 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 183.

28 The “nothing to express” is located in the “Three Dialogues” in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 139.

29 Jacques Derrida, “The First Session,” in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 160.

30 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Bergson writes, “Our life is thus spent in filling voids, which our intellect conceives under the influence, by no means intellectual, of desire and of regret, under the pressure of vital necessity” p. 314.

31 Beckett recognizes the need for a new language, or optimally no language at all, to excavate the metaphysical plight of being. The “ruins” of the representation of the world in *Lessness* is the experience of being. Paradoxically, it is the acknowledgment of such, that serves as the refuge for being. In *Lessness*, Beckett returns to what he had explored earlier in *Watt*: the human mind, in order to make order from apparent disorder – to introduce logic into an illogical relation – will at times unknowingly posit a word where no word exists, or contemplating the image of a circle for long enough will through the need for order and unity fill the gap that appears to oppose the logic of representation.

32 Quoted in John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 17

33 See Ruby Cohn’s *Back to Beckett*, p. 263.

34 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1954), p. 32.

35 Samuel Beckett, “Ill-Seen Ill-Said” in *Nohow On* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 75.

36 Samuel Beckett, “Molloy,” p. 176.

37 Philip Solomon, p. 65.

38 Saint Augustine, *Confessions* trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 267.

39 Sand is also symbol of degradation and regeneration; it is a symbol of the womb and rebirth. Indeed, in *The Calmative* the narrator states that “it was always from the earth, rather than from the sky, notwithstanding its reputation, that my help came in time of trouble.” In *The Dictionary of Symbols*, the notion of the earth as regenerative is equated to the regenerative forces of sand: “sand adopts the shapes of the bodies resting on it, and therefore comes to serve as a womb symbol, and is therefore linked to regeneration.”

40 The term “issueless” in *Lessness* echoes what Beckett had stated earlier – that art is intended to destroy surfaces in order to provide an unveiling in order to bring “light...to the issueless predicament of existence.” Lawrence Harvey isolates the phrase “issueless predicament” as the “predicament is man’s need, which can never be abolished. He is a creature of voids that ache to be filled, of nothingness that yearns to be something.” Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* p. 419-420.

41 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*, p. 186.

42 Interestingly, a similar vision is described in *Molloy*: “For what possible end to these wastes where true light never was, nor any upright thing, nor any true foundation, but only these leaning things, forever lapsing and crumbling away, beneath a sky without memory or morning or hope of night” p. 64.

43 J.E. Dearlove states that *Lessness* is even more static than *Ping*. This position is problematical in that Beckett places the emphasis on the “walls” now “blackened out,” “fallen open,” moving “over backwards” to reveal that the “refuge” is “issueless” and therefore “without” a unifying spatial organization as the forms of closed space are actively dismantled. *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), p. 120.

44 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 55.

45 Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), p. 26.

46 Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's New World's*, p. 188.

47 G.W. Leibniz, “An Elucidation Concerning the Monads.” 1714; rpt in *The Monadology of Leibniz* trans. H.W. Carr (London: Favil Press, 1930).

48 Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 279.

49 René Descartes, “Things We May Doubt,” in *A Discourse on Method* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1953), p. 82.

50 According to Einstein the “space aspect of real things is... completely represented in a field, which depends on four coordinate-parameters; it is a quality of this field. If we think of the field being removed, there is no ‘space’ which remains, since space does not have an independent existence” in the *Meaning of Relativity* (Princeton: 1953), Append. II, 4th ed., p. 163.

Chapter Nine

Residua: The Remainder which Remains

“They are residual (1) Severally, even when that does not appear of which each is all that remains and (2) In relation to whole body of previous work.”¹

What do I know of man’s destiny? I could tell you more about radishes.²

The intention of *Writing Sous Rature: The Metaphysics of Nothingness in Samuel Beckett’s Later Prose Texts* has been to undertake a radical reevaluation of a selection of Beckett’s later prose texts by subjecting them, for the first time, to an elucidation of Beckett’s underlying metaphysical agenda. It has often been the case in the past that these texts have been limited to discussions of their difficult structure and absence of plot, as critics have either attempted to analyze them by way of formalist readings, or to devise a story-line by arguing that Beckett was self-reflexively writing about his very own difficulties with writing fiction.³ The cost of such approaches has been substantial; Beckett’s later prose has remained on the borders of his *oeuvre*, and has subsequently been denied the readership that it deserves. Since the object of all great literature is, arguably, to raise the mind through the inquiry into, and the ongoing search for metaphysical truths, it is the attempt to elucidate the metaphysical quest that is the very relevance of literary criticism. As such, it is to these ends that this study of Beckett’s later prose texts has been undertaken, and it is this metaphysical analysis into the “timeless” self and world which articulates the underlying story that each of these texts has to tell.

Therefore, rather than seeking to describe these texts, for example, as mere artifacts of Beckett’s creative disintegration, the main line of argument has been that Beckett is

actually developing a new style for fiction writing, most specifically intended to give form to the very object that is the source of the metaphysical mystery surrounding being and world. By way of introduction, I have offered a reconsideration of the comments that Beckett made much earlier during his discussion of painting with George Duthuit in the *Three Dialogues* (1949) – and most importantly that the modern artist has, “nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.”⁴ Rather than viewing this statement as expressing an existential position in terms of the relation of non-relation between perceiver and perceived, I have argued that Beckett is literally expressing the impossibility of representing the “timeless” self and world through language.⁵ Throughout this study, it is argued that Beckett uses his own technique of writing *sous rature* (interchangeable with his “unwording the word”) in order to force language to fail, and moreover to express this failure to represent the “timeless” through language as nothingness.

In reconsidering this passage from the *Three Dialogues* and its application to the selection of texts that have been chosen for this study, I have defined the scope of Beckett’s metaphysical project. For Beckett, the obligation is to give a positive form to “nothing,” in order to express its consequences on the experience of being in the world. Because the non-relation between the subject and object is one from which modern painting has attempted to escape, it is through writing *sous rature* that Beckett elevates his writing in order to represent that, while there is an “absence of terms” that can account for the “timeless,” it is the representation of nothingness that actually denotes

this “presence of unavailable terms,” and which in turn contributes to the representation of the “essential” “timeless” that exists within being and world.⁶ Thus, what differentiates the expression of nothing in the texts discussed in this study from an earlier example like *Murphy* (1938), is that Beckett employs the failure of language to identify the “timeless” through the technique of writing *sous rature*, which in turn represents being and world as something that is also nothing (the unknown “timeless”). In doing so, Beckett finds a means through the metaphor of the *blanc* nothingness to represent the “timeless” self within, and the “timeless” world without.

Therefore, in order to give expression to nothingness and its metaphysical implications, I have argued that Beckett employs his own form of writing *sous rature*. Although this phrase is traditionally associated with Jacques Derrida (and before him Martin Heidegger), I argue that while Beckett does cross out the representations of being and world in order to express the lack of available terms for something that exists beyond signification, in each of these texts this is very much Beckett’s own style of writing which allows for two central, interrelated concerns. The first is that writing *sous rature* allows Beckett to establish a new “literature of the unword,” or “syntax of weakness” designed to reveal the inability of language to represent being through the linguistic sign.⁷ Beckett, in other words, seeks a new means to have language fail in order to represent the idea that language is incapable of capturing the “timeless” self and the “timeless” world – that the “existence of being has been “at the expense of all that it [representation] excludes, all that it blinds to.”⁸ As the narrator imagines the death of the imagination in *All Strange Away* for example, the image of Emmo is first represented in language and

then put *sous rature*: “Have him say, no sound, No way in, none out, he’s not here.”⁹ Since there is “No way in, none out,” Emmo has not physically escaped; rather, “he’s not here” because language cannot capture the essential “timeless” self in words, and therefore language is put *sous rature*. As a result, Emmo is something, in that the reader knows of Emmo through representation, and yet he is also nothing as he is crossed out with the phrase, “he’s not here,” which represents the “timeless” as the something of nothing that exists beyond the limits of language. Emmo is thus the presence of an absence, a representation of being that acknowledges the failure of language, and in doing so represents the “timeless” self as nothingness that (because it cannot be perceived) exists beyond the limits of language.

It is this intentional failure of language to capture the “timeless” that gives rise to the second, metaphysical aspect, of Beckett’s project. Writing *sous rature* offers Beckett the most creative means for representing the “incoercible absence of relation” by giving a positive presence to nothingness.¹⁰ In a text like *Ping*, for example, the act of writing *sous rature* allows Beckett to represent the image of being and being in the world in language, and then to virtually cross each of those images out. In doing so, being is not represented as if language could give it an “absolute” presence, but as the language fails, being and world are present and at the same time – through being put “under erasure” – absent:

All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn.
 Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls one yard
 by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white body fixed
 only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white.
 Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle. Light
 heat white planes shining white bare white body fixed ping fixed
 elsewhere.¹¹

In this passage, all that is known is a white body that has been placed in a white rectangular enclosure. The body and the enclosure are first described and given form, and then erased with the phrase “never seen.” The expression “never seen” does not create an “absolute” absence, but is intended to suggest that the “timeless” self is “never seen,” but exists as an a-temporal and a-spatial nothing. Throughout the remainder of the text, what is left are the “traces blurs” and the “signs” of the body and the rectangular enclosure each time they are put *sous rature*. In *Ping*, and throughout the texts under consideration in this study, Beckett is clearly expressing that being cannot be represented in “absolute” terms because there are no terms for the “timeless” self; if one wishes to represent being, then representation must acknowledge the failure of language, and through doing so, give form to that which remains unknown – to the “timeless” self as nothing. By writing being *sous rature* – representing the image and then crossing it out – this unknown *timelessness* is the positive representation of *blanc* nothingness, and it is this representation of this unknown nothingness that is at the centre of Beckett’s expression of the metaphysical experience of being.

Writing *sous rature*, therefore, allows Beckett to give form to nothingness as that very “timeless” “thing in itself” which remains outside the “zone” of traditional representations of being in the world. Throughout texts like *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Ping*, and *Lessness* (to name just three), Beckett, in a very real sense, seeks to empty the writing canvas as soon as it has been filled with language – to begin to restore the underlying whiteness that has been obscured by the colours (or blackening the text with writing) of representation. As such, Beckett gives nothingness presence as a *blanc* space

throughout these texts, beginning with *Texts for Nothing*, where for example, the narrator in “Text 8” states, “for ever the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single word and therefore meaningless, for it’s the end gives meaning to words.”¹² The end of words is the *blanc* space that denotes the failure of language to represent the “timeless” self and “timeless” world. The *blanc* space that remains is a positive nothing that has acquiesced to the limits of language, and thereby gives voice to the silence that Beckett, for example in *The Unnamable*, has suggested is the space where the real subjectivity of being is housed. Throughout each of the texts considered in this study, the *blanc* spaces of nothingness have played an important role, and one that is manifest by Beckett’s writing *sous rature*.

To give expression to the “timeless” as nothing, as we have seen, is the overall objective in these texts, and it is produced by Beckett’s own style of writing *sous rature*. Throughout this study, I have attempted to remain sensitive to the problems of reducing Beckett’s approach to one absolute system of analysis. Therefore, while *sous rature* as a means of expressing the failure to signify the “timeless” and the ensuing image of the “timeless” as nothing is the characteristic that binds all of these texts together, Beckett represents the failure of language to represent the “timeless” in terms of being, language, God, time, world, art, space and perception, all of which foreground the dynamics of Beckett’s agenda in these texts. What remains consistent is that Beckett is not seeking to write philosophically, but like all great writers, allows the objects and situations that he describes to represent important philosophical, and in this case, metaphysical problems that are universal in their scope.

Lessness, the final chapter in the virtual “residua” texts, offers the proper closure to this “system” of analysis: the question of the metaphysical experience of being is approached through the representation of God in relation to the world; through his own relation to the text Beckett reveals the non-relation of God to the world. God is the image of a presence of an absence (and therefore an image of nothing), which thereby allows Beckett to situate the “timeless” self of being, once and for all, as the new centre of metaphysical inquiry. Being, is a “refugee,” a *blanc* space waiting to be inscribed with a new language that will give rise to a more complete understanding of the “timeless” self and the “timeless” world, and it is this very objective which Beckett undertakes throughout the later prose texts through writing *sous rature*.

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Beckett to Brian Finney. Quoted in *Since How It Is: A study of Samuel Beckett's later fiction* (London: Covent Garden Press Ltd., 1972), p. 10.

² Samuel Beckett, *Enough*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 192.

³ With the exception of *How It Is*, which has a clear plot.

⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder Ltd., 1983), p. 139. All future references are to this edition.

⁵ It should be pointed out once again here, that S.E. Gontarski has voiced a similar opinion concerning the importance of this statement. Speaking of the same passage Gontarski writes, "'Nothing to express' is an active phrase: what remains to expressed is nothingness, primary absences." S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 10. Gontarski, however, does not relate this nothingness to the prose texts, nor explain how or what role this nothingness plays as a positive presence and an image of the "timeless."

⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, p. 145.

⁷ Samuel Beckett, "German Letter" in *Disjecta*, p. 173.

⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, in *Disjecta*, p. 145.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, *All Strange Away*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 170.

¹⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues*, p. 145.

¹¹ Samuel Beckett, *Ping*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 193.

¹² Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1995), p. 131.

CHRONOLOGY

But mostly not for nothing never quite for nothing¹

In order to clarify what is one of the most confusing areas of Beckett's work, what follows is a chronology of the principle texts that have been considered in this study. I have included both the dates of writing and the years of publication in both the French and the English first editions.

1950-52: *Textes pour rien*

These thirteen *Texts* were begun eighteen months after completing *The Unnamable*. Although published at different time and in a different order, the first French publication in a single volume was *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Les Editions de Minuit) in 1955. Beckett's English translation, *Texts for Nothing*, appeared in 1967 in the British *No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966* (Calder and Boyars) and in America as *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (Grove Press Ltd.) in the same year.

1958-60: *Comment c'est*

Comment c'est (Les Edition de Minuit), was first published in French in 1961, and was then translated by Beckett into the English *How It Is*. The English translations were published in Britain (John Calder Ltd.), and in America (Grove Press Ltd.), in 1964.

1963-64: *All Strange Away*

This “residua” text, *All Strange Away* was written, as Beckett has stated, on the way to *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Both, in fact, are part of the abandoned novel *Faux départs* (*Karlsbuch* 1, June 1965): 1-5. After its completion, *All Strange Away* was withheld by Beckett, and was not published until 1976 (Gotham Book Mart), some two years before appearing in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. Although attempted in French, the text exists only in an English version.

1965: *Imagination morte imaginez*

Begun in January 1965 and finished in March of the same year, Beckett distilled many of the images from *All Strange Away* into this brief short prose masterpiece. First published in the French *Imagination morte imaginez* (Les Editions de Minuit) and then translated by Beckett into the English *Imagination Dead Imagine* (Calder and Boyars). Both French and English editions appeared in 1965.

1966-72: *Le Dépeupleur*

Le Dépeupleur was begun in 1966 and then abandoned by Beckett due to what he referred to as “intractable complexities,” which are indicated in and by the eight versions of the narrative that have survived. While parts of this text were published in 1967 and 1968, the complete *Le Dépeupleur* (Les Editions de Minuit) with the addition of its fifteenth section, was first

published in 1970. Beckett then undertook the translation, changing the title to *The Lost Ones* (Calder and Boyars), which first appeared in 1972.

1965: *Bing*

Beckett wrote that *Bing* (which was originally titled “Blanc”), was the “result or miniaturization of *Le Dépeupleur*.” Beckett referred to it as “suitably brief and outrageous all whiteness and silence and finishedness. Hardly publishable which matters not at all.”² *Bing* was first published in French (Les Editions de Minuit) in 1966, while Beckett’s English translation *Ping*, first appeared in *No’s Knife* (Calder and Boyars), in 1967.

1969: *Sans*

Concerning *Sans*, Beckett wrote to Lawrence Harvey: “Fear I’ve shot my bolt on me and the work both shadowier than ever. At least you’ll have a near-neant [near nothing] fornenst [in front of] you.”³ This “near nothing” (not absolute nothing), was the French “residua” text *Sans* (Les Editions de Minuit) published in 1969. Beckett translated the text into *Lessness* (Calder and Boyars) which was published in 1970.

ENDNOTES

¹ Samuel Beckett, *Sounds*, in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 267.

² Samuel Beckett in a letter written to Jocelyn Herbert, 18 August 1966. Notice how Beckett's writing *sous rature* has even found its way into his letter writing, "which matter" is out *sous rature* by "not at all."

³ Samuel Beckett in a letter to Lawrence Harvey, 22 April 1969.

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